LEFTY LEIGHTON

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Paul Hayes
Miss Straine
123 period

LEFTY LEIGHTON

MINUTE AFTER MINUTE HE STOOD WATCHING THE WATER CREEP UP.

Lefty Leighton. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 122)

LEFTY LEIGHTON

By

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

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LEFTY LEIGHTON

CHAPTER I

GONE

LEFTY LEIGHTON pushed his coffee cup aside, rose from his chair and escaped to the porch. But even in that cool, quiet retreat he could hear his uncle's querulous voice trailing out through the open living room windows, the screen door —everywhere.

"Hmph!" came the voice. "You can't tell me but what it was all cut and dried and everything. Mrs. Cole acted like she was mighty suspicious. . . ."

The boy heard his aunt push her chair from the dining table. "Pshaw, Charles!" said she, with a hint of annoyance in her voice. "How on earth could you tell that Mrs. Cole was acting as if she were suspicious; how could you determine a thing like that when you just talked with her over the phone?"

"Do you think I'm such a fool that I couldn't hear how shaky her voice was?" returned Mr. Hulbert, contemptuously. "I guessed right away that something was in the wind when she said that that young scoundrel son of hers . . ."

"Chilton," Mrs. Hulbert interpolated patiently.

The irate man ignored the rebuke and rose from his chair also. "It's enough that she said his bed wasn't touched last night and that their cook saw him come out of his father's room, run down the stairs and out of the front door," said he, tersely.

"And did you say Mr. and Mrs. Cole were in the city last night?" asked Mrs. Hulbert, wearily.

"That's what, and I'll wager that the young scoundrel wasn't snooping in his father's room for nothing. Just as I said it was all cut and . . ."

"Still I cannot see what that has to do with our Kenneth."

There was the rattle of dishes, and Lefty smiled. He knew that his aunt was tactfully breaking up a heated discussion by removing the

"GREAT DOINGS AROUND HERE LAST NIGHT—HUH, LEE?" SAID FENTON.

remnants of an unpleasant breakfast into the kitchen. Boylike, the thought of delicious pancakes left untouched by his aunt and himself, took precedence over the unhappy state of affairs that reigned in the Hulbert household that morning. And yet he could not help thinking of the warmth of maternal love that emphasized those two words, "our Kenneth." A little mist gathered in his eyes and he flung himself into the porch swing hardly knowing whether to cry it out or laugh it out. Certainly, his aunt had championed the cause of his brother, Kenneth.

"But if uncle would only stop harping," he said aloud. "Ken's gone and that's all there is to it. He took his own money—*gosh!*"

"Kenneth never got in his bed *either*—the two scoundrels went together!" Mr. Hulbert's voice droned in upon the boy's musings. It was like some evil spirit.

"Now he's at aunt in the kitchen," said the boy, hopelessly. "He'll start it right from the beginning—how Mrs. Cole called up at seven o'clock this morning and said she discovered that Chilton hadn't been in bed at all last night and could Kenneth tell them anything about Chilton—Kenneth and Chilton were pretty good

friends—gosh! Aunt will have to jump in the ocean to get away from hearing it."

"There's one thing and it isn't two," said Mr. Hulbert, "it's bad enough that Kenneth's gone, without taking Chilton Cole along. Now we'll never hear the end of it from Mrs. Cole."

"That's absurd," said Mrs. Hulbert, patiently. "Kenneth's impulsive, but he wouldn't be responsible for Chilton Cole; I'm certain of it. They've never left Mapletown together."

"Well, this house wasn't good enough for Kenneth to stay in evidently," said Mr. Hulbert, decisively. "He needn't come back—*ever!*"

Lefty's face darkened, but the shadow passed quickly at the sound of a door closing just across the way. He looked up in time to see Fenton Cole, Chilton's brother, hurry down the steps and across the broad green lawn that spread on either side of the Coles' pretentious looking home.

"Great doings around here last night, huh, Lef?" said Fenton, as he reached the Hulberts' narrow little walk.

Lefty put his finger to his lips in a gesture for silence and nodded toward the screen door

as Fenton was heard coming up on the porch.

"Uncle's on the rampage," he said. "Things are bad enough without letting him hear any more. Gosh, I got so tired of hearing him talk about how ungrateful Ken is, I couldn't eat my pancakes. Neither could aunt. I bet I didn't have more than a mouthful of coffee, too."

"Gee, it's too bad," said Fenton, sympathetically. "Still, things aren't much better over at my house. But then, parents—I mean a feller's mother and father aren't likely to be so hard about things of this kind—not like an aunt and uncle."

"Aunt's been as good to Ken and me as any feller's mother," said Lefty, loyally. "It's *uncle*. He never reasons anything out; he just starts shouting. Right away he's thinking the worst of things."

"I know. My father's hashing it out with my mother now, too. That's why I skipped out as soon as I could." Fenton regarded his home with a thoughtful stare.

"Did you have your breakfast? I mean, did you eat everything?" asked Lefty, ruefully.

"Sure, nothing takes away *my* appetite."

"My uncle would if he was around."

"Well, I'm glad he isn't then. But say, Lef, to get down to brass tacks—do you think Chilton and Kenneth *did* go off together last night?"

"*No!*"

"Hmph, that sounds like as if you didn't think so," Fenton said, with a chuckle.

"*I know so,*" said Lefty, emphatically. "I ought to know my own brother."

"You ought to," Fenton said, soberly. "I thought I knew my brother too, Lef, but it seems I didn't."

Lefty turned in the swing and looked anxiously at his companion. "What do you mean by that, Fen?"

"Well," said Fenton, with lowered voice, "it seems that something else disappeared in the house last night too—something besides Chilton."

"*Gosh—what?*" asked Lefty in a ghostlike whisper.

"Now, don't ask me that, Lef, because I don't know. Father just said that Chilton had something with him and he didn't mean Kenneth."

"You don't mean that he . . ."

"All that father would say was that in Chil-

ton's case one dollar was as bad as a million and that a safety pin was as bad as a diamond."

"It sounds like a riddle," said Lefty.

"It isn't though. Father never tells riddles, Lef, not about serious things anyway. He's hopping mad at Chilton and he said that if he doesn't hear from him by tonight, why, he'll know that this running away business was intentional."

"For about two years Ken's been talking that he would like to go to sea as a cabin boy," said Lefty. "I always knew that some day he'd get the fever bad enough and go. He and I have been working hard for the last three winters to save up money enough to go to camp this summer. Ken took that money away with him—the money that he earned, and that isn't any crime, is it?"

"I should say not," Fenton agreed. "But Chilton didn't have any money to go anywhere with and that's what I can't understand. He never said anything about wanting to go away—he's always been crazy about planes and being an aviator but he knew he was too young to think of it yet."

"Well, I'm sorry," said Lefty, decisively,

"but it's one of those things that just happen. I know Ken didn't have anything to do with Chilton going away—*I know it.* He always said that when he went away he'd go it alone, and he *did.*"

Lefty left nothing for Fenton to say. His confidence in his twin brother loomed up between the two comrades like a stone wall and the time was to come when it would thrust itself in the path of their friendship.

CHAPTER II

DEFENSIVE

Mapletown settled down in the peace and quiet of early summer and soon forgot that there were two of her native sons missing from her shady streets and flowering byways. A whole month had already passed since Chilton Cole and Kenneth Leighton left for parts unknown.

But the families of the missing boys had not forgotten. To be sure, they went about their tasks just as usual but the gap in their households was always in evidence. In the palatial home of the Coles on High Street a bitter father paced the floor night after night telling his family over and over of the double disgrace that his runaway son had brought upon him. It was only to be expected, therefore, that in the course of events this knowledge should find its way into the simple little bungalow across the street.

The knowledge got to Mr. Hulbert's greedy ears the night before Lefty was scheduled to leave for Donellen Camp, a scout camp in the

Adirondack Mountains. It was to be the boy's first summer at a camp and as he was still a scout of the second class, one may readily understand with what joy and high hopes he was looking forward to it. There had not been a cloud on his horizon until he sat down to supper and it was his querulous uncle who unsheathed the first storm warning.

"Well," said he after consuming a spoonful of soup, "I got talking to Mr. Cole 's afternoon down at the works. He asked me if it was true that Kenneth had been threatenin' to go 'way to sea for a long time back."

Lefty's tanned cheeks revealed a trace of red but he devoted himself sedulously to his food and said nothing. Mrs. Hulbert, however, laid down her soup spoon and looked up inquiringly.

"Well, I never!" said she. "How absurd!"

"Nothing of the kind," said Mr. Hulbert. "Mr. Cole seemed to know pretty well what he was talking about. Said Fenton told him last night for the first time after he's been questionin' him for this month or more. He wants to get at the bottom of the whole thing, he says, and now that he's heard how Kenneth's been premeditatin' this thing for so long he's goin'

to hire detectives and get them on a different track from what he planned first off. I was never so ashamed in my life, to have a man like Mr. Cole—*the big boss of the works,* question me in front of everybody."

"And why should *you* be ashamed?" asked Mrs. Hulbert, taking up her spoon again.

"Hmph," Mr. Hulbert growled into his food. "Why should I be anything else when he almost accuses the nephew I've brought up from an infant (and who turns out to be an ingrate) of having a hand in making his son a thief and luring him away from his home!"

"How does he dare!" exclaimed Mrs. Hulbert. "What . . ."

"He dares because Kenneth was pretty thick with the young scoundrel and he dares because it's the first time his son ever did anything dishonest!" Mr. Hulbert flung his words across the table with a triumphant sneer.

Lefty dropped his knife on the floor and it had a most startling effect on all of them; almost as if that were the bombshell exploding instead of Mr. Hulbert's statement. For a moment the good woman and her nephew sat tense and silent.

"Let's not have any more insinuations about Kenneth, Charles," said Mrs. Hulbert at length. "What is this about Chilton—what did he do?"

"Stole somethin'," said Mr. Hulbert. "Cole wouldn't say *what* exactly—he said it was a valuable article that Chilton could turn into money any time. There wasn't any money lying around in the house that night and I s'pose that was the next best thing he could think of. Those are the boss's words exactly. And what I was most ashamed of was, that he seems to think that it wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for Kenneth."

"*Too bad* about Mr. Cole!" said Mrs. Hulbert, stoutly. "What influence would our Kenneth have over a boy like Chilton? They are the same age, they have the same romantic natures. . . ."

"Bosh!" interpolated Mr. Hulbert. "It's just pure devilishness, that's what *I* call it. And you can bet that Cole thinks so too, that's why he figured it out if Kenneth's been braggin' about going away this long time that the two scoundrels have been hashin' it out."

"They weren't hashing anything," said Lefty quietly. "I ought to know."

"Yeh, well if you knew so much that was going on why didn't you say something before?" questioned the angered man.

"Because Kenneth is ambitious and wanted to go away to make something of himself so's he wouldn't be a burden to you and aunt any longer," said Lefty vociferously.

"Oh, the poor, poor child," said Mrs. Hulbert.

"*Poor,* nothing," growled Mr. Hulbert. "I'm the one to be pitied after raising him and gettin' no more thanks than . . ."

"Charles, that's quite enough," said the good woman in a patient voice. "Kenneth is impulsive and you can't expect him to stop and think which would have been the better way. He simply grasped the first opportunity that presented itself, poor boy. To think he ever had the idea that he was a burden—oh, my!"

"Yeh, and to think he ever had the idea of plannin' with Chilton Cole to be a thief so's I can be under suspicion by Cole himself and maybe lose my job," Mr. Hulbert whined.

Lefty rose to his full height of five feet and five and a half inches. His clear blue eyes looked steadily across the table at his grumbling

uncle and he shook his head decisively, bringing a thick lock of unruly hair down upon his forehead.

"Maybe Ken didn't do right by running away the way he did," said he, with a quivering voice bespeaking his fourteen years. "But one thing, he thought he was doing right, so that makes things different and besides he isn't hurting anyone exactly (excepting make aunt feel bad), and he took his own money." His voice wavered for an instant, and then he said, "Not even will I stand for my own uncle saying that Ken's had anything to do with whatever Chilton's supposed to have done or the planning of it—*I won't stand for it!* You can't say it again and get away with it, *you can't!*"

With tears streaming from his eyes, this usually easy-going, good-natured boy ran from the room and up the stairs. He tumbled into his bedroom and picked his way through several small heaps of clothing that had been gathered together in preparation for his departure on the morrow. The joy with which he had anticipated that departure had suddenly dissolved into thin air, as it were. No matter how delightful the summer might prove to be, he knew that it would

not be quite as delightful as he had dreamed and planned it would, now that the scene downstairs had transpired. It had simply stripped this new adventure, on which he would start tomorrow, of all its glamour and thrill.

He groped his way in the gathering dusk of the room, sought out the chair alongside his bed and sat down. The tears gradually ceased, leaving small dry shining patches on either cheekbone. After a time he reached out and pulled the cord of his bed lamp, flooding the room with light.

That little gesture brought him out of the despair into which he had fallen and he set about folding up his clothing and packing it into the steamer trunk that stood in the far corner of the room. As he progressed with his task there became evident a certain grim resolve in the tilt of his strong chin.

"Well, there's this much about it," he said a little later, "I won't hear any more of it for two months. And when I come back from Donellen, uncle will have most forgotten it. But I'm glad I got in my say tonight, that's one good thing. Gosh, I know what Ken *is* and what he *isn't!* Anyway, he isn't a—a—well, I'll show uncle

and Mr. Cole too that he wouldn't even help Chilton to be one!"

Lefty was as good as his word. Indeed, he almost sacrificed his own good name in carrying out that resolve.

CHAPTER III

LOOKING AHEAD

Lefty was spared another scene with his uncle the next morning for he slept overtime and when he came down to breakfast he was relieved to hear that he was to eat alone. Mr. Hulbert had left for his place of business, the Mapletown Paper Mills, or the "works" as the townspeople were wont to call it.

"Your Uncle Charles has been gone this half hour, dear," said his aunt. "I'm glad for your sake, for I want you to go away with only the happiest memories of your home. You will, won't you?"

Lefty smiled at this good woman who had always been so loyal and kind to his brother and himself. "I'm happy now," said he truthfully, for the morning was warm and sunny. "I'm just not going to think about what happened last night or anything. After all, I suppose I shouldn't be worrying over what people say about Ken—even if he is my own twin brother."

"But you do," smiled Mrs. Hulbert sweetly. "And I love you for it, Lefferts. There's something about loyalty that sticks out all over a person and it does that with you."

"It does with you too," Lefty said laughingly.

"Well, it isn't a bad trait," his aunt returned. "In fact, it's a very good trait where Kenneth is in question. An impulsive boy like him needs every bit of loyalty and love that a brother can find it in himself to give. And you'll always do that, I know."

"*I'll* say I will!" exclaimed Lefty, looking out of the window. Then, "There's Fenton coming out of the house now, aunt. He's loaded down like a truck horse. Gosh, I hope he . . . no, there's their car coming around the drive. That means we won't have to hire a taxi to the station. Mr. Cole must have stayed home to see him off. I better run up and get my stuff so's I don't keep them waiting."

"Yes, you better," said Mrs. Hulbert, in a flutter. "But while we're still alone, Lefferts, I want to tell you. . . ."

"Yes?"

"If there's anything mentioned about Kenneth on your way down to the station," she said,

glancing the while out of the window, "speak up the same as you did to your Uncle Charles last night."

Lefty turned around. "What makes you think I wouldn't, aunt?"

"I didn't think you wouldn't, Lefferts," she answered smilingly. "I just wanted to remind you in case Mr. Cole tries to cow you into agreeing with him. He is obstinate when he gets an idea in mind—they all say that down at the works. But you have mind enough of your own and you'll know what to say. You'll always remember that it's a sort of reflection on me to have people think ill of Kenneth—I've tried so hard to make him a good boy."

"And you have, aunt," said Lefty, feelingly.

"I know it, Lefferts. He *is* a good boy, but when a thing like this comes up and suspicion gets even the tiniest foothold, people are likely to forget how good he has been, and it's my job and yours to uphold him without flinching—right to the end. Here they are at the door, dear. Run up and get your things and I'll tell them to wait a minute."

Lefty ran up the stairs, taking two steps at a time. He fairly flew into his room, racing

around breathlessly and picking up his luggage with trembling fingers. For, after all, what could gossiping people and a missing brother mean when the time for his first camp experience was at hand! He was first and last a thorough boy of fourteen years and it was quite in the natural order of things for him to push disappointment and anxiety into the background when joy and summertime beckoned him so gaily.

And so in this happy frame of mind he left his home and Mapletown behind, unsuspecting that each mile travelled brought him that much nearer the great adventure.

CHAPTER IV

EN ROUTE

"So FAR, things seem to be going my way," Lefty told himself as he settled down into his comfortable seat on the Shore Express. "I feel as happy now as any feller here."

And to be sure he did. For as he looked about at the happy, smiling faces of his scout comrades he felt assured that he would not fail in anything that summer. He was out for all the merit badges he could get because he had set his heart upon returning to Mapletown as a scout of the first class.

It was a pretty good sign when Lefty set his heart upon anything for he usually got what he went after. Indeed, it almost seemed that things sometimes came his way just by the asking. Take his scouting career, for instance—it began when he was within a month of his fourteenth birthday and three months later, in his calm, easy-going manner he was talking about throwing off the yoke of a second class scout.

"I'm going to show uncle," he said to Fenton Cole, who was sitting beside him on the express. "I won't come home a second class scout—not while I'm in my right mind. I wish I could grab some special honor, just to show him."

"That's just the time it never happens," said Fenton, crossing his ungainly legs.

"Well I hope it does, just the same," said Lefty, looking wistfully out of the window at the passing scenery. "Aunt hopes so, too—she told me only before I came out that she did. Uncle thinks scouting's the bunk—that's why he didn't let me join until I was able to work and pay the dues myself. He says I'll never get anywhere with it; he bets anything I won't."

A slim, gawkish-looking boy of their own age peered around from the side of the high leather-backed seat directly ahead of them.

"Maybe he bets right," said he with a light laugh.

"Oh, hello, Dill," said Lefty, with a good-natured smile. "You heard me talking, huh?"

Dillon Brown, also a scout of the second class, swung his long, lanky legs around and thence out into the aisle and perched himself on the arm rest of his seat. "Sure, I heard you," he

said, faintly smiling. "Even if I didn't, I could almost guess what you were talking about. What *else* have you been talking about since you joined up?"

"Scouting," Lefty admitted with a broad smile.

"*And how!*" exclaimed Dillon. "When you first came into the Wolves I thought you were going to go around with our fellers and have some fun, but gee, we only see you on meeting nights."

"His uncle's always got something for him to do," said Fenton, casually. "The only way I get hold of him is to go over and park myself in his porch swing. Then if he has to sweep the sidewalk or mow the lawn, why, I'm sure to be on the job and get a few words in."

"But if uncle happens to put me on the job of cleaning up the cellar or the back yard, you don't get those few words in, huh?" said Lefty, rather wistfully.

"Well, never mind, Lef," said Fenton, consolingly. "You should worry now about your uncle or the back yard or front yard or anything else. We're on our way to Donellen now and you've got two months when you won't see

a broom. Gee, you deserve to have a pile of fun and. . . ."

"We'll have him where we can see how he manages to do so many things at once, huh, Fen?" asked Dillon with the same light laugh.

"What are you talking about, Dill?" inquired Lefty.

"Don't look so innocent, Lef," Dillon returned, with a forced gaiety in his tones. "You know what we're all wondering about—all except Scoutmaster Corlett. Every feller in our patrol, even Fen, has wondered how you managed to get along in scouting like you have, when you're always working at home and delivering papers and groceries, and gosh knows what else! Corlett says you've just been born to it—that it will come as easy for you to grab merit badges as your breakfast."

"I hope so," Lefty laughed. "If they didn't come easy I wouldn't get them. But I don't know why any of the fellers should be wondering about me. What have I managed in scouting that's so different from you or Fen or . . . gosh, I'm still a second class scout, the same as the both of you."

"Sure you are," said Dillon, seriously, "but

that doesn't mean you're going to stay that way. It'll be just your luck to qualify for first class before you come home and ten chances to one Fen and I won't."

The Shore Express picked up speed for they had reached the meadows prior to entering the great tunnel that would bring them into New York. Lefty watched the high, waving marsh grass and with his knuckles tapped at the dusty window pane. His mind was far from the realm of scouting at that moment; indeed, his whole being was tingling with the anticipation of having an hour between trains in New York which he and his comrades had been given permission to spend as they pleased. That had been unanimously agreed upon by the troop on their last meeting night and Lefty looked forward to an hour's sightseeing along Broadway, since it was his first experience in the big city without the guidance of his aunt and uncle.

"Just think," said Dillon, loath to abandon the subject, "Fen and I have been in the scouts for a year and a half, and here you've been in it only four months! Maybe you're not so lucky in some things, but you sure have luck on your side when it comes to scouting."

Lefty chuckled good-naturedly and shrugged his shoulders as if to say that it wasn't his fault. He had not the chance to enlighten Dillon Brown further, for the booming bass voice of the conductor roared from one end of the train to the other: "All windows closed! Tunnel!"

Scoutmaster Corlett rose from his seat a little way down the aisle and nodded smilingly up and down the train to see that the boys of his troop were carrying out the conductor's orders. To be sure, they were doing that very thing for pandemonium reigned what with the hoarse shouts of scouts in holiday spirit and the slamming of heavy windows. This continued until the long train slid into the tunnel like some gliding monster, and the first rush of compressed air into the coaches had a quieting effect on the merrymaking boys.

Dillon Brown had returned to his seat and each scout was sitting in a silent, breathless expectation to feel the train slowing up as it rolled into the Pennsylvania Station. It was during this lull that Fenton Cole tugged at Lefty's coat sleeve.

"Lef," he whispered, "I've got a hunch that Dill's got the green eye on you."

"Talk English, Fen," Lefty returned, instinctively lowering his voice.

"I think he's jealous of you," explained Fenton.

"*Me?* You're crazy," Lefty returned with a chuckle.

"I'm not crazy. Think over what he's just been saying and you'll have to admit he's the crazy one."

"He must be if he's jealous of me. *Gosh, why?*"

"Well, didn't he remind you that he and I have been in the scouts for a year and a half, and that you've been in it only four months?"

"What of it?"

"Don't ask me to answer that, Lef."

"Who can answer it, then?"

"Dill. He's mad because you're likely to beat him, that's the way it looks to me. He's that kind, Lef. A nice feller with a weakness for wanting to be at the head of the class. Doesn't it seem that way to you?"

"Now that you mention it, but. . . ."

"*But*, nothing, Lef. I know what I'm talking about—you can tell it's the one thing on his mind. Take a tip from me, he won't be able to

keep from saying it right out. He's pretty honest, Dill is, and that's why he's bound to spill it overboard."

"That'll be a good thing then," Lefty said laughingly. "It'll be out of his system."

At that moment the train rolled in between two gaily lighted platforms. "Pennsylvania Station. *All out!*" boomed the conductor's voice from the opened doorway of their coach.

"Boy, we're here," Fen murmured joyously.

"*Oh, boy!*" Lefty exclaimed, breathlessly, and jumped to his feet. "I feel as if I'm standing on eggs, Fen."

"Maybe you are," answered Fen, responding to his comrade's spirit. "Look and see if you are."

CHAPTER V

THE PASSING CROWD

They were lingering at this and that shop window and now and again would find themselves way behind their scoutmaster and troop. That meant a breathless run, dodging in and out of Broadway's bustling humanity in order to catch up, for Scoutmaster Corlett was ever on the alert to keep them together.

"Let's give him a little scare," said Dillon Brown, when he and Fenton and Lefty had stopped to inspect the very attractive show window of a sporting goods store.

"How?" asked Lefty.

Dillon pointed toward the lobby of an office building next door where a constant stream of people kept the revolving door in perpetual motion. "We'll keep going around 'till Corlett gets worried and comes back looking for us. We can see him going past and when he does we'll beat it out and get with the bunch. He'll get the surprise of his life when he comes back and

finds us with them, huh? What do you say?"

Fenton and Lefty fell in with this plan immediately. It seemed to fit in with the spirit of the day and they proceeded to the revolving door without delay, having first made sure that Scoutmaster Corlett was preoccupied with the rest of the troop a little farther up the block. Dillon Brown led the way.

They had circled twice, to the amusement of the many loiterers in the lobby, and had stepped aside to let those who were entering from the street side use the door. Fenton and Dillon watched this influx while Lefty's eager eyes studied the surging throng out in the street.

It had only been a moment before that he had remarked to Fenton that he had never seen so many people in his life. His eyes were fixed on the crowd—a glimpse of laughing faces that vied with the bright, balmy day, and here and there a shadow emanating from some scowling-faced individual. It was like some passing picture and so intently was he watching it that he knew that the radiant faces of two boys moving through the center of the throng were real and no mere figment of his startled mind.

"*Ken! Chilton!*" he said in a choked whisper. Instinctively he turned toward his companions, but they were not looking his way at all. Dillon had, at that moment, drawn Fenton's attention to a midget who was strutting out of the elevator to the right of the lobby. Lefty breathed more freely and stepped through the revolving door impulsively.

On the street he sought those two heads that were so familiar to him and saw them after a moment's breathless search. They were half a block ahead then, moving peacefully along with the throng. Lefty moved after them determinedly.

He forgot about Fenton and Dillon and Scoutmaster Corlett. Nothing else mattered to him except reaching the two fugitives. Every now and then a halt in the traffic impeded his progress and with a sinking heart he could see them getting farther away. He *had* to reach them! He must learn the truth for he had staked much of his self-respect in defending Kenneth against his uncle's insinuations.

"But he *is* with Chilton all right," he murmured as he pushed himself forward. "Oh gosh, after I said he *wasn't*—after I

stuck up for him that he didn't go with Chilton!"

He sought the two heads again and decided that he was gaining a little. His spirits rose considerably and he told himself that perhaps, after all, they could explain the whole thing satisfactorily. Lots of people were falsely accused and after a period of years were able to clear themselves of unjust charges.

But it wouldn't be years with Kenneth and Chilton for here they were not a quarter of a block away. The last traffic halt had been in Lefty's favor for he had gained considerably and he could now see Kenneth's head jerking in that peculiar way he had when he laughed. It warmed his heart to see it, for he loved his brother deeply.

Now they crossed Forty-Second Street and Broadway, and out of the subway exits in that great cross-street poured a veritable army of human beings. Lefty lost sight of them then and though he strained his eyes in a dizzying effort to discern them among that ant-like mass, he did not see them again.

The poor, distracted boy did not give up hope but rushed in and out among the people without

thought or consideration. His eyes were ever ahead and when he reached Fortieth Street without success, he turned back and searched each side street as thoroughly as he could, but was doomed to disappointment.

"Maybe they went in the subway that time," he said, hopelessly, as he recrossed Forty-Second Street. "Maybe—*gosh!*"

His eye lighted on a jeweler's clock farther up the street and he was shocked to see the two great hands within a minute of the noon hour. The train had gone! Kenneth and Chilton had gone! And his troop and scoutmaster—what were they thinking?

He stood on the curb not knowing what to do. He seemed for a moment to be unable to think clearly. His eyes roved restlessly from one passing face to another until suddenly he decided upon a perfectly natural course of action, considering his age, and that was to buy himself something to eat.

He moved back along Broadway until he espied an orangeade stand at which he bought two glasses of the luscious, cold, golden-colored beverage and two hot dogs. After consuming these he treated himself to two bars of milk

chocolate and while his mind was quite miserable with thoughts of Kenneth, his boy's self gloried in the unexpected freedom that chance had given him. It was worth a little misery of mind to be alone on Broadway and feast on hot dogs and orangeade.

Before leaving the refreshment stand, he counted the money he had in his pocket. His board at Donellen Camp was already paid for the entire summer season and his aunt was holding back twenty-five dollars for him in the event that he might need more before he returned. Yes, he could afford one more luxury, he decided, and still have enough left for spending money during the many weeks to come.

So he stepped out to the curb and, hailing a passing cab, tried hard to sound brave and sophisticated as he ordered the driver to take him to the Grand Central Station.

CHAPTER VI

SCOUTMASTER CORLETT

LEFTY had a few minutes to think of the rather odd situation in which he had placed himself. Without having been lucky enough to get even within calling distance of his brother and Chilton he must now put the spotlight upon himself doubly, by entering Donellen alone after giving his comrades the slip so furtively. And the heart-sickening part of it was he would be compelled to explain something that was inexplicable for he had accomplished nothing by his mad chase; he had learned nothing.

And too, there was Kenneth's good name at stake. He wasn't forgetting the promise he had made to his aunt and, furthermore, it wasn't doing justice to his brother to sow the seed of suspicion in other people's minds by telling them that it was true—Chilton Cole and Kenneth Leighton *were* together.

After all, the mere fact of their being seen sauntering the streets of New York City to-

gether, did not mean anything. It was not incriminating exactly; it was just unfortunate and Lefty decided, as the cab neared the station, that he was not going to add to that misfortune. He would have to know it all before he would tell anything.

"I've got to hear it straight from Ken first," he resolved in a breathless whisper. "Aunt would say that was best. It looks pretty funny, but so does everything that a feller can't understand. I still believe what I told Fen that day after Ken went away—I still believe he didn't have any hand in Chilton's monkey business, whatever it was."

He learned from one of the gatemen that the next train for Ticonderoga would leave in five minutes and he hurried back to the ticket window not without misgivings. Five minutes was a very short time and it would bring him to Donellen much sooner than he liked. He had secretly hoped that the entire camp would be in bed and sound asleep by the time he arrived.

"That's just my luck," he mumbled to himself as he pocketed his change and his ticket. "I'll catch a bus right on time, everything. . . ."

Someone tapped his shoulder. "Lefferts, where have you been?"

Lefty wheeled around, taken completely unawares. "Mr. Corlett! Gosh. . . ."

"I've been sitting over there on that bench for the past hour, I guess," the scoutmaster said. "I knew if you were coming at all you'd be sure to stop and get your ticket and I've been watching every door and ticket window in the place. If you hadn't shown up for this train I was going to telephone your aunt and uncle and ask their advice. Why, I didn't know what to make of it—I was on the verge of going to the police."

"I know, I'm awful sorry," said Lefty with flushed cheeks. "I—I. . . ."

"All right, my boy," said the scoutmaster, kindly. "Save your explanation until we get on the train. Time is short, as you must know."

"Where—where are all the fellers?" Lefty ventured as he picked up his knapsack and hurried along with the scoutmaster.

"They left on the train as scheduled and I put Cromwell in charge. The bus will meet them at Ticonderoga so everything will be all right, I hope. I couldn't leave the city with you hav-

ing disappeared so mysteriously. You must realize I'm responsible to your aunt and uncle for anything that happens to you—I'm responsible for every boy in my troop, Lefferts."

"I know, I know," Lefty acknowledged, nervously.

They passed through the gate and made their way to the train in silence. After they were seated comfortably and Lefty's knapsack was consigned to its proper place, the train moved out of the station.

"No more time than we needed," said Scoutmaster Corlett. "I sent my luggage on with the boys. It's good you showed up or I would have had to go all the way back to Mapletown until morning."

"Gosh, you don't think I would have stayed away—you don't think that, do you?" Lefty asked, as if it were unthinkable.

"It's hard to tell what a boy will do," answered the scoutmaster whimsically. "Especially the Leighton boys. Kenneth shows a disposition to disappear for long periods and Lefferts shows a disposition to disappear for short periods. I wonder if you have any idea of how worried I was. From the time young Cole

and Brown came running up to me with the news that they couldn't find you until the time I spied you at that ticket window, I was pretty anxious."

"Gosh," said Lefty, contritely, "I realize that. I realized it as soon as I came to my senses. I got awful excited, Mr. Corlett. I thought sure that two fellers I saw were—were two fellers I—I once knew."

Scoutmaster Corlett looked at his charge thoughtfully, but said nothing.

Lefty went on. "I was so excited I never thought anything about it—I didn't think about Dill or Fenton or anything. I just kept chasing through the crowds down Broadway trying to catch up to them, but I was fooled. I didn't find them and I searched the side streets and everything but I might as well have saved myself the trouble. It was all of a sudden that I realized what a mean trick I was playing on you and the fellers, so I came here as quick as I could. I even took a taxi."

Charles Corlett was a young man of twenty-five. He was dark, with kindly blue eyes that had a way of studying one even while they twinkled, and it was said among the boys of his

troop that "you could never put anything over on him." He had a well-earned reputation of knowing "his boys" and they well knew that he knew when they were telling the truth and when they were not.

Perhaps that is why Lefty made no effort to conceal his movements, albeit he did not tell the full truth. And yet he did not feel that he had kept the truth from his scoutmaster—he knew from long experience that what he had left untold was already known by this keen young man who had the reputation of knowing his boys.

With this in mind, he drummed his knuckles upon the window sill and said, "I've—I've got my reasons, Mr. Corlett, because I can't tell the whole of it when I only know the half of it. Gosh, you understand."

"Yes, I do understand, Lefferts. Perfectly. Forget about it and enjoy the summer while it's yours to enjoy."

And by that understanding attitude, Scoutmaster Corlett endeared himself to the heart of Lefty Leighton.

CHAPTER VII

DONELLEN

"Counsellor Aiken wrote me the first part of the week that he intended doing some camp shopping in Ticonderoga today," said Scoutmaster Corlett as the train neared that famous old Revolutionary town. "I wrote him a short note asking him to wait around town until this train if it was possible, for I happened to remember that he parks his car at the station. I also happened to remember his license number, so Fenton Cole got the job of placing the note in an advantageous position on the car if he could find it. If he was fortunate we'll have a nice ride in the sunset."

"And if he wasn't?" Lefty asked with a smile.

"Then we'll have to take our chances with bus and taxi and goodness knows what all before we get to Donellen," answered the scoutmaster with a quiet chuckle. "We might even land in Schroon Lake."

"We can always swim back to shore anyhow," said Lefty. "I wouldn't mind it."

"That's what I like about you, Lefferts," said Charles Corlett. "You seem to make the best of most everything. In some, that is weakness, but in you it's strength."

"I only get excited and feel full of fight when something happens like—like when Ken and I are in danger—not danger exactly. . . . Oh, gosh. . . ."

"What you mean to say is that you can't stand idly by and make the best of things when it's a question of defending yourself or another. You'll fight for the right in other words, eh?"

"You bet. Gosh, you have my number, all right, Mr. Corlett."

"If I haven't, I'll be disappointed. We're rolling into the station now, Lefferts. Get your knapsack. . . . Fenton delivered the note all right. There's Aiken down at the end in the maroon colored car."

Lefty nodded with delight and a shock of unruly hair came tumbling down over his forehead. "Now I'm not a bit sorry that we didn't come up with the fellers," said he. "I'd rather ride in a swell car like that any time."

They left the train and walked up the platform toward Counsellor Aiken's car. Corlett looked down at his young charge and smiled whimsically.

"This part of the country makes a fellow feel like a bird," he said.

"Gosh, that's just what I was thinking," Lefty admitted, unable to conceal his surprise. "Funny how we both thought the same thing. Just now I wish I had wings."

"Perish the thought," said Charles Corlett smilingly. "You disappear quickly enough on your legs. What you would accomplish with wings is unthinkable."

Lefty laughed. "No more disappearing for me. It gave me a fright when I came to, I can tell you. The next time I run away like that it will be after myself."

"You quite certain?"

"Absolutely, positively."

They both laughed and stepped up to greet Counsellor Aiken. Lefty was invited to occupy the rear seat in solitary glory in order that he might contemplate the great Adirondack country undisturbed, while Corlett sat in front to talk over scouting and business in general.

"Lefferts is a wizard at scouting," he explained to the Counsellor after they were started. "He's risen to second class scout almost without effort and he wants to go home wearing the first class badge."

"Well, there's plenty of room up here for him to do that in," said Counsellor Aiken. "If he has the will here's the way." He waved a big brown hand at the vast stretch of mountains that loomed up before them.

"That's all you want to know, isn't it, Lefferts?" Scoutmaster Corlett asked whimsically.

"I hope to tell you," Lefty answered. "If there's a way, I'll find it."

Both men applauded and Scoutmaster Corlett fell to talking of ways and means of improving the big camp. Lefty fell into a reverie, his eyes fixed on the lofty spires that were etched against the sky and the purple sunset that seemed to spread itself all over the sky as they went on.

The car rolled over the smooth macadam through aisles of balsam and spruce and pine. A little dip and they flashed over a tinkling brook, then turned into a country road that was already dim with twilight, so closely arched were the trees on either side of the road.

They struck a rut and Lefty came within a half-inch of striking his defenseless head upon the roof of the car. "Hold 'em," the Scoutmaster said, smiling. "From here on, Lefferts, you'll be constantly reminded that you're jogging along on terra firma. Donellen's pretty close to nature, you know."

Lefty was glad of that intelligence. He wanted to be close to nature as long as he could, especially since Kenneth's departure, and he told himself as they climbed steadily upward that his brother had missed the chance of a lifetime. Donellen already promised much more than he had dared hope.

Twilight had deepened into dusk when they came into the camp and his first hurried glimpse of the big settlement was little more than a blur of cabins and trees and mountains with the lake lying like a great pool of ink in the center. A camp fire was in the making at the lake's edge and around it was a great gathering of scouts looking like so many flitting moths in the growing glow of the flames.

"Now to rout out Columbia," said Scoutmaster Corlett as they drove into a rustic-looking garage.

"Who's Columbia?" asked Lefty.

"The gem of the cooking shack," laughed Counsellor Aiken. "He's black outside and pure gold inside and he can always be depended upon to feed the hungry up to the time he goes to bed. After he goes to the employees' quarters and is once inside his room for the night all the entreaties in Christendom won't bring him out. In answer to appeals for food he will simply tell you to "snack fo yose'f, massa—de key am hangin' jes inside de scween do' on de right side."

"We won't have to bang on his door tonight, Aiken," said Corlett, looking down the little hill upon which the cooking and eats shacks were situated. "They're still lighted up."

Lefty was immediately introduced to Columbia's hospitality and decided that that kindly colored person lived up to his reputation. He was gorged with creamed asparagus on toast, combination salad, cake and fruit and two tall glasses of milk, while Columbia himself stood solicitously in the offing ready to be of service and regaling the hungry trio with tidbits of camp gossip.

"How did my boys behave at their first camp

supper, Columbia?" asked the scoutmaster. "Did they go wild?"

"Nuffin' like dat, Massa Corlett," replied the colored man. "Dey was very happy, I mus' say, but pufec'ly peaceable. Counsellor Rawlins says dey did very well. Ah was too busy tuh talk tuh dem much, but dere's de whole summah tuh talk in. One o' dem rascals ob your crowd got in heah undah ma feet jes' when ah rings de suppah bell an' he gets me tuh promise ah'll give him some scraps o' grub in de mawin so's he kin lure a crow what he wants tuh take a picture ob. Lan' sakes, but dat chile's got patience—ah don' know how many times he tried las' year, but twa'n't no go."

"Oh, you mean Dillon Brown, eh, Columbia?" Scoutmaster Corlett asked smiling.

"Dat's de very one—yes sah; fer de minit ah forgot de name. Dey is a pow'ful amount o' boys an' it's hard tuh 'member all o' dem, but ah sho won't fergit dis boy's name becawse it fits him double. He's left-handed, ah see."

"Lefferts—Lefty," said Lefty, grinning good-naturedly. "That's what I'm called, Columbia. That's what you can call me."

"Right off we is friends," said the big chef

with a radiant smile. "Dere is no need of yo evah goin' hungry, Massa Lefty. Not while Columbia's 'round heah."

"All right," Lefty laughed. "I'll remember that."

He felt strangely alone when they left the brightly lighted eats shack behind. To be sure, there was the radiant glow from the campfire at the lakeside and his scoutmaster was guiding him up the little hill to the Wolf Patrol Cabin—he was not alone and yet. . . .

"Gosh, it's surely dark here nights, huh?" he said, suddenly.

"It just seems that way the first night, Lefferts," answered the scoutmaster. "All newcomers experience that. Indeed, I experience it myself every year. I noticed it before you spoke, but I knew that it was just a case of getting used to it again. By tomorrow night you'll hardly notice it and when you're here a week you'll be so used to it that you'll be able to walk around anywhere and find whatever you go after."

"That's something to look forward to," Lefty said with a quiet chuckle.

"You'll have more than that to look forward

to," said the scoutmaster, putting his arm about Lefty's shoulder. "You have to qualify for a good many tests, you know."

"That's easy," said Lefty. "That's never any trouble. Suggest something hard for me to do, Mr. Corlett."

"All right," said the scoutmaster, thoughtfully. "Suppose you compete with Dillon and see if you can't get the Audubon Prize for taking a picture of a crow. Counsellor Rawlins is its sponsor and there's twenty-five dollars in it for the lucky boy. Every boy in this camp tried last summer, but before August was half gone they had petered out, until only one contestant remained. That's Dillon Brown and, as you heard Columbia say, he's going to try again this year. How about it?"

"It doesn't sound so hard."

"That's what every boy thought who tried last year. That's why Mr. Rawlins offered the prize. He said that it was the one thing to test a boy's ingenuity and I agree with him. One needs to be very clever indeed to outwit Mister Crow. Let me tell you, Lefferts, he is one of the most sagacious birds we have. Lure him with every delicacy possible and hide yourself

with brush and leaves as you will, he knows where you are and that the food is there to trap him. You may get him in an off moment. Many have. But it is difficult, as witness Dillon's many attempts. Do you think you'd have the patience?"

"Sure, that's what I have a lot of—patience. But I haven't even a camera, Mr. Corlett."

"Use mine. It's permissible. After all, it isn't the camera that tests your resourcefulness; it's how you're able to get the crow to stand still long enough to take the picture."

"That's a go," said Lefty, enthusiastically. "I'm all keyed up to see what I can do."

"All right. There's no particular hurry, I guess. We can talk it over sometime tomorrow, for I don't think Dillon's likely to have any startling results right away. Now, here we are at your cabin."

Lefty stood on his tiptoes and looked in through the broad window under which they were standing. "They're unpacking and fixing up," he said. "Gosh, what a noise."

Corlett smiled and ruffled the boy's hair. "They'll quiet down as soon as they see you," said he.

"*And how!*" exclaimed Lefty, looking toward the window wistfully. "Man, what questions they'll throw as soon as I get in there."

"You can circumvent them."

"How?"

"Jolly them out of it—out of asking questions, I mean. Start in as soon as you put your head inside. Tell them that you'll give them three guesses as to where you were. No one will guess and so you don't have to tell them."

"You're sure they won't?"

"Quite certain, Lefferts. Now, I'll call in for order and then you can jump over the top, as it were."

"Over the top is right, Mr. Corlett," said Lefty, with a nervous laugh. "That's just how I feel—as if I'm going over the top of something."

"Of course you do," said Corlett kindly as he patted Lefty's shoulder. "You're going over the top of scouting. Here goes!"

"Here goes," said Lefty, and laughed.

CHAPTER VIII

QUESTIONS

LEFTY followed the scoutmaster's advice with a small measure of success. No one guessed where he had been and after the excitement and surprise of seeing him had lessened, the scouts of the Wolf Patrol went merrily on with their noise and unpacking.

Lefty also made a great flourish of unpacking his belongings while Dillon Brown, his curiosity far from being appeased, ensconced himself on the cot at his elbow plying him with questions. Fenton Cole stood by, idly, silently, with a hurt look in his gray eyes.

Perhaps that is what bothered Lefty more than anything. He could put up with Dillon's questions by returning questions, thereby confusing him and evading the issue for the time being. But he had no verbal weapon with which to combat Fenton's reproachful silence and he told himself more than once before the bugle blew for "lights out", that it was a great deal

more difficult than either he or Scoutmaster Corlett had realized.

While the last few notes of the bugle were still echoing through the big camp, Dillon Brown desperately tried one more series of questions.

"No kidding, Lefty, where did you meet Corlett? How? Wasn't he mad as the dickens? Didn't he give it to you straight from the shoulder?"

Lefty grinned and shoved his empty bag under the cot. "Just so you'll rest easy tonight, Dill, I'll tell you that Mr. Corlett and I met in the Grand Central in front of the ticket window. We caught the train two minutes after, to be exact, and he didn't give me anything straight from the shoulder. We had dandy talks all the way and at Ticonderoga we met Counsellor Aiken and when we got here they took me over and introduced me to Columbia and some swell eats. You know the rest. Now'll you toddle along and let me get to bed?"

Dillon could not hide his disappointment. "Aw, you make me sick and tired," said he. "What's the idea of all this mystery, anyway?"

"No mystery," Lefty returned. "Gosh, if you think I'm holding out anything, I'll tell you what Columbia gave us to eat. We had. . . ."

"Say, listen," said Dillon, testily. "If you can't tell me what I want to hear, don't tell me anything."

"That suits me," said Lefty, with his good-natured chuckle. "It doesn't pay to be too nosey, Dill."

Dillon sauntered off toward his own cot without further comment. Lefty watched him for a moment with evident amusement and was about to undress when he became aware that Fenton had not stirred, but was still staring in that same reproachful way.

"What's got into you, Fen?" he said, bending down and unlacing one shoe. "You look like a ghost or something. Gosh!"

"What's got into *you*, you mean," Fenton returned coldly. "I thought you were a friend of mine—gee whiz, couldn't you tell a friend what happened instead of beating around the bush about it. Gee whiz, you could have given me the wink when you wanted to run off, instead of sneaking off like you did. We looked up and down that street until we could hardly see, we were so dizzy."

"Fen, don't go off the handle about nothing," said Lefty quietly, so that none of the other

scouts could hear. "I am a friend of yours, I hope, and when I have something to tell you, *I'll tell you!* And I didn't sneak off from you that time—not exactly. I can't tell you why I did it because it sort of involves honor—I couldn't tell the President of the United States even if I wanted to because I don't know enough to tell. Gosh, if you're such a friend of mine, can't you wait and trust me about a little thing like that?"

"Sure," Fen returned, with a forced laugh that was not unlike a sneer, "I'll trust you, but you don't trust me and that's what gets me sore as an owl. Maybe we better not hang around together until you know enough to tell me, huh? I'll be thinking of it all the time if I go around with you and we won't have any fun, so that's that."

Lefty had a difficult struggle with himself to keep from offering his half secret as an armistice. But he won by reasoning that it was better by far to lose a friend than to cast that ugly shadow over his brother's character, for it needed only that confirmation relayed from the Cole home to the Hulbert's simple bungalow and his uncle's door would be closed to Kenneth forever.

"And he'll want to come home some day," Lefty thought. "He won't want to stay away for very long—he'll miss aunt and me too much. Gosh, if I told, Fen would write home right away and I couldn't stop him. He's anxious to get Chilton in right with his father and I can't blame him—he'd love to shift the thing to Ken and say, 'I told you so, Lef'—don't I know how he feels? Well, I got to get my brother in right, too—some day he's coming home."

And that was how Lefty came to turn to Fenton and say, "Trusting you has nothing to do with this, Fen. You've got to wait like I said before. Gosh, can't you understand?"

"Sure, you're as clear as mud," Fenton said sullenly. "Anyhow, what's the use of talking about it—we don't get anywhere. You feel one way and I feel another and there you are."

"Hey you, Fen," interposed Larry Horton, patrol leader of the Wolves, "scoot for the feathers! It's five minutes since that old tin horn blew, do you know that?"

"I don't know anything," Fenton returned, laughing sardonically. "Ask Lefty." He leaped over Dillon Brown's cot to his own and undressed.

Two minutes later the cabin was in darkness, but not silent. There were too many plans to be made, too much to talk over to call it a day quite then, and in consequence the place buzzed with whispering, laughing voices. The shadows fairly throbbed with anticipation and expectation of thrilling adventures, and camp honors to the fortunate. And everyone was planning the morrow's programme, with the exception of Lefty, who lay in his cot next to the wall not a little heartsick as he listened to the conversation that was going on between the two cots adjoining his.

"It's a lot of fun, Fen," said Dillon Brown, with a great deal more emphasis on the word *fun* than Lefty thought was necessary. "While you were in Europe with your people last year trying out your camera on other people, I was up here trying out my camera on crows. Some job, believe me."

"Do you mean you tried all summer long and didn't get one picture of them?" Fenton called out in the dark.

"*Them!* Say, you must think it's like rolling downhill or something. Gee whiz, *them,* no less. Why, a feller's lucky as the dickens to get a

picture of *one!* Ask Counsellor Aiken, ask Corlett, ask anybody who knows anything about them! That's the reason Aiken was so liberal with his twenty-five dollars as an award. He knew it was a pretty thin chance unless a feller has patience and plenty of that. I didn't think the award still held good this year until I spied the notice tacked up on the bulletin board after we got here."

"If at first you don't . . ." said Fenton sleepily.

"Want to come with me tomorrow?" Dillon was persistent.

"Sure." was the almost inaudible reply.

"All right, that's a go. I've ordered the lunch for the crows already, so after breakfast I'll hop in on Columbia and order lunch for two human beings, huh?"

Fenton grunted something and in a few seconds silence pervaded the cabin. One by one they had dropped off to sleep and Lefty listened, wide-eyed and awake. His stare seemed to penetrate the darkness, so intent was he on his own thoughts and above his tossing head he could clearly visualize the face and smiling brown eyes of his brother, Kenneth.

After a time, he sighed wearily. He had had a rather strenuous day of it and as soon as he relaxed, sleep beckoned him comfortably and he closed his eyes. A second later he turned on his side and his eyes flashed open again, so loath was he to relinquish the thought of his brother. But nature rebelled—he couldn't hold his heavy lids open long enough to conjure up even the merest shadow of his brother's mischievous face.

And so he resigned himself to sleep. He made a perfect circle round his head with his long, muscular arms and his head was half buried in the pillow. It was from this snowy mound, a few minutes later, that there came a perfect jumble of talk, to which the suddenly awakened Dillon Brown gave an attentive ear. He sat up, leaning heavily on one elbow and straining every nerve to get each word.

"Chilton . . . Ken . . . gosh, there's some reason," Lefty was muttering in that thick, throaty way that sleep-talkers have. "Some day he'll be coming home. Some day . . ."

A spasmodic sighing followed this outburst and then Lefty's turbulent mind gave way to perfect repose, for he did no more talking in his sleep that night.

Dillon Brown listened for a long time, but his vigil went unrewarded. There were plenty of sighs and snores and mumbled bits of talk from other sleepers in the Wolves' cabin, but he was not interested. His mind was too full of Lefty's little revelation. To be sure, those few words meant little as words go, but it threw a little light on the day's mystery. At least, he was on the track of something and Fenton would be glad to know it.

Dillon grinned with self-satisfaction, pulled the blankets up around his neck and settled down to sleep.

CHAPTER IX

ON CROWS

The gods smiled favorably on Lefty for a little while the next morning, just long enough to make him realize that there was much he could find to do that summer besides moping over Fenton's decision. He could manage without his friendship if he had to. And this new order of things was brought about by Scoutmaster Corlett; in point of fact, it was through him that the gods smiled.

Lefty had gone down to the eats shack feeling quite disgruntled and out of tune with the world in general. Fenton and Dillon had purposely excluded him from their conversation, feigning a deep preoccupation in the question of how to lure a crow to the camera, but Lefty noticed after he had passed that they were not too preoccupied to notice Larry Horton who presently caught up to them. Larry was still with them when they sat down to breakfast.

Lefty picked at his cereal until Curt Dobbins

whisked into the vacant chair at his right side.

"Oi, oi," said Curt, breezily, "everybody's got a grouch on this morning except me."

Lefty reacted to this instantly and gulped down a great spoonful of cereal before turning to Curt. "Why say *everybody*," he said, with his old easy-going chuckle. "You didn't happen to notice that I'm still in the Wolves, did you Curt?"

Curt laughed and attacked his cereal also. "I guess I didn't mean to include you, Lef," said he, apologetically. "In fact, a feller just takes it for granted that you never have a grouch on. You're always about the same—you never get mad, do you?"

"Only at myself," Lefty laughed.

Fenton Cole glanced up from his plate, his eyes met Lefty's and quickly dropped. Dillon Brown fidgeted a little, then made a great pretense of eating. Curt was not long in sensing that he had rather stirred up an atmosphere and although he, too, was puzzled by Lefty's strange behavior of the previous day, he had decided that it wasn't any of his business and never would be.

"That's the way I feel about it," he had said

to Larry Horton the night before, when Lefty and Fenton were having their discussion. "Most everybody's got a good reason when they act like Lefty's acting. I like him, no matter what, and when he gets ready to tell what happened today he'll tell it."

"I s'pose so," Larry had said, not very convincingly. "It's just kind of a funny way for a feller to act with other fellers, that's all. It's not like as if we were a pack of girls."

Some of the Wolves had agreed with Larry and some had agreed with Curt. All agreed that Lefty was rather an unknown quantity to them—they liked what little they knew of him and saw of him. To be sure, that was very little indeed considering that they saw him only one night a week for a few hours. In four months' time it wasn't so many hours.

Perhaps they were all thinking of this when Scoutmaster Corlett came briskly in and took his place at the head of the table. He looked from one to the other of "his boys" who were trying to confine themselves to their food and act as if it were a perfectly natural process. The scoutmaster knew better.

"It's bad for the digestion," said he, whimsically.

"What?" asked Lefty with twinkling eyes.

"All eating and no laughter," the scoutmaster replied, with a smile for Lefty. "It seldom happens, but when it does it has a bad effect on me. What's happened—all you fellows get out on the wrong side this morning?"

"Sounds like it," Curt answered. "That's what I tell them. *I* didn't, I know that. Believe me, I feel like whooping things up. And I am! Larry's had a date with me for two months and he's going to keep it!"

"You bet I'm going to keep it," said Larry. "Where are we going?"

"I mean to get the hiking badge this year. I've got only about fifty miles or so to go before I get it. Want to burn up some of those miles with me?"

"I hope to tell you," answered Larry, right in the spirit. "Do we start right off this morning?"

"Bet your life."

"How about me?" asked Billy Rhodes, another of the Wolves. "Do I fit in with your clique? I want to try for that badge myself."

"Well, there's no time like the present," answered Curt. "Anybody else?" He looked at Lefty significantly.

"I'm out of your party, Curt," Lefty answered, wistfully. "You'll have to wait until I get promoted before I try for any badges."

"Gee, that's right. I forgot. You're still second class. So's Fenton and Dillon—too bad."

"Fen and I are hopping over that East Trail this morning to look over the crow situation," said Dillon with a forced laugh. "We'll have enough to keep us busy."

"*Again?*" asked Billy Rhodes.

"After last summer?" Curt inquired with astonishment.

"Sure," Dillon answered, a little boastfully. "Why not?"

"He's a bear for punishment," Larry put in laughingly.

"Good*night!*" said Curt, for want of something better to say. He felt Lefty's temporary exclusion keenly, for with Chilton and Kenneth's desertion it left the Wolves minus two members. "What are you going to do, Lefty?" he asked, as an afterthought.

"*Me?* Oh, I don't know," Lefty answered lightly. "I'll find something to do."

"Come with us?" Curt asked kindly.

"No thanks, Curt," answered Lefty, his heart warming toward the boy. "I'll find something to do. You know I've got a few tests yet before I make first class. After that I'll be thinking about merit badges too."

"I know," said Curt. And to himself, he said, "He's one good sport, Lef is." But aloud, he added: "Maybe you'd just like to hike along with us this morning and look on, huh?"

"Gosh, I'd like to, Curt, but time's so short. I want to do things."

"I've urged him to try for the Aiken award, Curtis," Scoutmaster Corlett interposed. "That's what he's going after this morning and I'm going with him to show him the likely places. After all, he doesn't know any more about the Adirondacks than you fellows did before you came here. It's full of tricky trails, as you know, and the best of scouts sometimes make mistakes, so I've appointed myself as guide."

"He hasn't a camera even," said Dillon sulkily. "How can he try for the Aiken award?"

"I've offered him the use of mine, Dillon,"

smiled the scoutmaster. "That's permitted, you know. That will spur both of you on, to know you're competing with each other."

"Maybe it won't spur the crows, though," said Dillon. "Look how long I tackled it last summer!"

"Two heads are better than one," said Corlett smilingly. "What you haven't thought of, perhaps Lefferts will."

"I ought to know something about crows after the way I stuck at it," said Dillon, trying to sound cheerful. "Lef doesn't know a crow from a hawk, I bet."

"I bet," said Lefty smilingly.

"That means he does," said Curtis with a laugh.

"I'm inclined to think so too, Curtis," said the scoutmaster. "At any rate, Dillon, it ought to be fun to compare notes; say at the end of two weeks? Keep a detailed account of each day's endeavors, eh?"

"If you say so," answered Dillon, sullenly. "But maybe nothing'll happen in two weeks."

"That's the chance you take. Both of you. I'll take Lefferts up through the woods on the West Trail. There's that big open field this

side of Bronson's farm, you know. That'll keep both of you well apart, and guessing from day to day."

"*I* should do any guessing," Dillon said laughingly. "I should worry about what Lefty does. I have my own way."

"Good," said the scoutmaster cheerfully. "Do you think you have your own way too, Lefferts?"

"I guess so," answered Lefty, good-naturedly. "One way's as good as another, I suppose."

"That's what I say," Curt interposed. "And now that we've got two honest-to-goodness rivals for the Aiken award, we'll know where we're at. Where are we?"

"Eating breakfast," Lefty answered, with his familiar chuckle, although he was perfectly aware that Dillon's glance was not exactly a friendly one. Neither was Fenton's.

Before the morning was half over, he wished that there wasn't a crow in the whole of the United States.

CHAPTER X

A RIDDLE

After breakfast Lefty walked over to Scoutmaster Corlett's cabin and helped him get together the necessary equipment for their crow expedition, as he called it. And when that was accomplished the scoutmaster sent him off to his own cabin to get into a suitable pair of shoes.

"I'll wait here and let you have the job of tackling Columbia when you get back," the scoutmaster called after him.

"For the eats?" Lefty inquired good-humoredly.

Corlett nodded smilingly. "I have an ulterior motive," he said. "Columbia confided to me this morning that he took a great liking to you."

"That means I'd get an extra portion of everything by going in and asking myself, huh?" Lefty called back whimsically.

"Righto. Hurry up now."

Lefty ran on up the hill and was quite breath-

less when he flung open the door of his cabin. At first glance he saw that Fenton and Dillon were the only ones there. The beds were all made save his own and he congratulated himself that the change of shoes had brought him back to attend to this important task.

"Gosh, I almost forgot about my bunk," he said, shutting the door briskly. "I'd surely get in wrong if I forgot that, wouldn't I?"

He was aware that he had broken in upon a conversation between these two, for he felt that sudden, strange silence that is sure to fall when the person under discussion enters upon the scene. Fenton and Dillon had certainly expected him to forget about his bunk, for their surprise and dismay at seeing him was evident. Neither one did anything but stare for a few moments, sitting on the edge of the cots and watching Lefty straightening out his bed as if he were a phantom.

"I wonder what would happen if I forgot to do this," he said, as he pulled the last cover into place. For some reason he felt very uncomfortable under the steady gaze of the two boys.

"Nothing would happen," said Dillon, in the same sullen tone that he had used at breakfast.

"Why—why," said Lefty in surprise, "sure, it would. It's a rule, isn't it?"

"Sure, it is," answered Dillon with a loud laugh. "But not for a scoutmaster's pet. I guess you can get away with almost anything when you're in with Corlett, huh? Even doing the disappearing act when you keep dates with people that you've pretended you don't know where they are."

Lefty's face was livid and his lips quivered. "You know that isn't true, Dill—not any of it!" he almost shouted. "Mr. Corlett isn't the kind to make a pet of any feller. He likes us all, but he just wanted me to take a try at this crow business because I'm new. And I can't get away with anything, either! I wouldn't try to if I could. He sort of knew about yesterday without being told, if that's what you mean. He—he understands, where others don't try."

Fenton flushed vividly and fumbled with the nap on his blanket.

But Lefty went on. "And about pretending things, Dill," he said, with a vehemence that surprised himself, "I don't pretend anything. I either know about a thing or I don't and since the both of you are acting like a couple of peeved

girls, I'll keep what I do know to myself until . . . well, until I get good and ready to do something else."

Dillon laughed sardonically. *"You'll keep what you know to yourself,* huh?" he repeated laughing. "Gee, that's a good one, Lef. You can't keep what you know to yourself, not when you talk in your sleep!"

"Cut it out, Dill!" said Fenton angrily. "You've. . . ."

"Just what do you mean, Dill?" Lefty demanded without raising his voice. His blue eyes glowed with excitement.

Dillon looked crestfallen and ashamed. "I—aw, I don't know—I heard you talking in your sleep, kind of. Not that I heard much, Lef, but it started me thinking. . . ."

"Thinking never hurt anybody," Lefty interposed, reaching for his hobnailed shoes. He was quite calm again and the good nature that his comrades so envied asserted itself. "As for talking in my sleep—well, if there was anything I said that I'm sorry for, I'm glad of it! Gosh, I've often dreamed I was falling off a cliff. But I didn't fall off any cliff at all."

He chuckled with glee, tied the laces on his

shoes securely and started for the door. "So long, fellers," he called gaily over his shoulder. "Here's hoping the crows sit nice and pretty!"

"So long, Lef," Fenton returned, clearly abashed.

Dillon Brown could think of nothing to say.

CHAPTER XI

A LITTLE GENIUS

"THAT ought to do it, don't you think so?" asked Lefty, as he secured a stake fast in the earth. He was on his haunches and inclined his head to one side as he surveyed his handiwork.

"I think it's splendid, Lefferts," answered Scoutmaster Corlett. "You're a genius in the making to conceive such a thing." He stood just behind the scout and watched him admiringly.

"Oh, it was just a hunch," said Lefty modestly. "It came to me on our way back from here the other day."

He took a piece of wood, about six by twelve inches and nailed it to the stake. Then with lightning dexterity he unwound the finest of copper wire from a large spool that he brought out of his pocket, and secured it to this miniature platform that reposed on the stake. From there he gradually released it, trailing the wire through the high grass until he reached the edge

of the woods and pulling it a little more taut at that point.

"Can you see it when I do that?" he asked.

"No. It's fine," answered the scoutmaster.

"Now when I call out, bring your hand down quite hard on that platform, huh?"

"I will."

Lefty stepped in between two trees, the foliage of which all but veiled his view of the great open meadow. They served his purpose in making an excellent hiding place for the camera which he had placed on a rock just level with the platform and held securely by rocks placed around it.

Now he pulled his wire still more taut and took the spool into his left hand while he set the camera with the other. That accomplished, he clipped the wire from the spool and fastened the end to the shutter.

"O.K. Mr. Corlett!" he called gaily.

Instantly the taut wire vibrated its entire length and the shutter clicked. The camera moved not one bit in its tiny fortress. It worked better than Lefty had even hoped.

"Gosh, it holds too," he cried gaily as he set it. "And we've only had to waste one picture in the bargain."

"Fine," Mr. Corlett applauded as Lefty came out of the hiding place. "Now for the bait, eh?"

Lefty took a few odds and ends of cake crumbs and a slice of apple out of his pocket and placed them on the end of the platform nearest the camera. Corlett held it steadily in order to keep the thread-like wire from pulling at the shutter.

"That's that," he said, as they moved away from it. "Mr. Crow will never see through that ruse, I'm certain. Looks like a miniature see-saw, doesn't it?"

"That's what gave me the idea," Lefty answered. They turned away from the meadow and into the woods on the West Trail, stopping a moment to look at the clever trap and make certain that everything was in readiness for any unwary crow which should chance forth in the meadow.

"I'll be as anxious as you, Lefferts," said the scoutmaster. "I'll look forward to tomorrow morning just as if it were going to be my prize that was being tried for."

"It's your camera, Mr. Corlett," Lefty reminded him. "If I'm lucky enough to get a picture of one, it'll be half your prize."

"Oh, no, Lefferts. If I offered you my boat

to race and you won, it would be your strength that did it. In this case, it's your ingenuity that will do it. I would never have thought of such a device—never."

"All right, Mr. Corlett," Lefty said happily. "We won't argue about that until I see what's happened by tomorrow. Or maybe Dillon's rigged up something by now and had some luck."

"I doubt it. He was in the kitchen again this morning pestering Columbia. He wanted something sweeter, he said. Something that would lure the crows better than bread crumbs. Fenton wasn't with him—I saw him going off with Larry and Curt. Dillon went toward East Trail alone."

"Hmph," said Lefty ruminatively, "I guess Fen had enough of sitting in the bushes for two days."

"Dillon is certainly dogged. It is almost stubbornness on his part to think that after all his attempts he can fool Mister Crow into thinking he is not sitting behind those bushes."

"He's got a lot of patience—more than I have. But gosh, Mr. Corlett," said Lefty, looking back over his shoulder, "I hope that camera is safe and stays put until tomorrow."

"It will, Lefferts. Few people ever come this way. The only ones I know of are the Bronsons from the farm. They use it very seldom; just when they happen to have something extra that Columbia needs in the kitchen and the son usually brings anything like that. Other times they bring the supplies around over the Lake Road in the market truck. Anything else you can think of to worry about?"

"Absolutely nothing," Lefty answered. "I was just worried that someone would get snoopy and come up here and spoil all my plans. But that's off my mind. I'm hungry."

"That's what I say," said Scoutmaster Corlett. "You've well earned your supper tonight. Our trip down to town and then way up here and back again—goodness, we ought to sleep soundly tonight, eh?"

"Boy, I know I will," said Lefty. "If the Adirondacks blew down all around me I don't think it would bother me."

The Adirondacks didn't blow down to bother him, but something else bothered him. It was something that did far more damage than the mountains could have done, for it disturbed his peace of mind.

To begin with, he walked briskly into camp at his scoutmaster's side, flushed and happy that he had earned the admiration of a man like Corlett. They had made splendid time hiking back and had almost a full hour before the evening meal.

"I guess I'll wash and dress and freshen up a bit," said the scoutmaster.

"Guess I will too," Lefty said. "Think I'll go over to Administration Cabin first, though. Want to see if there's any mail from home."

"Always looking for bad news, eh?" asked the scoutmaster smilingly.

"Mostly," Lefty laughed. And they parted.

Counsellor Aiken's secretary, Miss Todd, saw Lefty as he came across the wide rustic porch and toward the door of the office. She hurried back into their little post office department, snatched a letter from one of the cubby-holes and was back at the railing as the boy entered the big room.

"Something for you all right, Master Leighton," she said pleasantly, holding out the white envelope at arm's length. "It's been here all day. Been on a hike?"

Lefty took the envelope and gave the hand-

writing a cursory glance. Something smote him —something inside his throat. Ken's handwriting! Postmarked New York! He crumpled the letter up in the palm of his hand and his Adam's apple moved visibly as if he forced the shock down his throat for the time being. Then he smiled.

"I—I've been on a sort of hike," he said with the faintest quiver in his voice. "Mr. Corlett and I. We're trying to get a picture of a crow."

"Oh," said Miss Todd smilingly. "You at it too? Well, it requires patience, they say. Wish you luck." Her eyes fell back to the mail she had been sorting before the boy had come.

Lefty turned on his heel and left the quaint building with a sigh of relief. It was hard to talk when one's mind was on other things, he thought. Everything seemed blurred and misty out of doors, he was so excited. He hoped he wouldn't meet anyone until after he had read the letter. Where could he go without being observed?

He stopped and looked around. A group of scouts were just coming up from the lake road after a day's hike. Another group was coming down the East Trail. Probably they had been up

pestering Dillon, he thought. Other than that, the camp was quite deserted and by the sounds emanating from the cabins on all sides, the rest were getting ready for supper.

He'd go down to the float! No one was out on the lake, he observed, as his worried eyes scanned the smooth water. No one was likely to go at that hour. He sighed and started down the well-worn path, jamming the crumpled letter into his trousers pocket.

With that gesture, a strange sense of foreboding seemed to grip him from head to foot. An omen? He was just excited, that was it. Why should a letter from his brother be an omen? Why? He didn't know—he ought to be glad to hear from him after all this time.

"Postmarked New York," he said aloud as he reached the float. "It's postmarked *New York!*"

CHAPTER XII

THE LETTER

LEFTY perched himself on the prow of a flat bottomed boat and looked about to assure himself that no one was going to take him unawares. He then brought out the letter and while smoothing out its rumpled surface stared hard at the postmark once again. It was as if he feared the meaning of that more than he did the contents of the envelope.

"It'll be hard for me to admit to Fenton that I didn't know Ken after all," he thought as he opened the envelope. "That's what's the matter with me—I'm afraid of hearing the *truth.* Gosh, but I can't believe it of Ken somehow. . . ."

He pulled out the note paper and read each line carefully, letting his gaze stray now and then to the heading, which was:

Midtown Field.

Dear Lef:

Would have written to you before but wanted to make sure you were up at camp

first. Wasn't taking any chances writing to you at home.

I came out here with Chilton. He's alongside of me now but he's afraid to write to Fen because he says he knows he'll not be able to keep from going to Mr. Cole with the news. Anyway don't tell Fen anything until I write and tell you or until I see you because I've given Chilton my word that you wouldn't. There's a good reason.

Oh, I was telling you about being out here! I didn't intend to come at all—I was going right down to the docks and see if I could grab me a job on some nice boat going to South America. But Chilton's made me wait and see what's in the aviation bug. We both got jobs as office boys at the airport here because he wants to get acquainted with some aviators so's we can maybe get on the right side of them and be asked to take a nice long trip. We gave our age as seventeen and everybody's falling for it.

I'd like to see you before I go to sea. I mean to go as soon as we come back from that nice air trip that Chilton thinks we'll get a chance to take. Anyway, I'll write and tell you whatever we do, but please don't be sore, Lef, because I went away without telling you. I knew you'd argue the idea out of my head if you found it out and honestly, I couldn't stand Unk's nagging any longer. Now he won't have me to

add to his burden like he says. Even if he doesn't mean it he shouldn't say it. Maybe I'll come back after I see a few things—I like to keep moving.

You can tell aunt when you see her that I'm well and that I didn't want to make her feel bad and that she shouldn't worry. Don't write anything about me to her, though—in fact, don't tell *anyone, anything!*

And remember, until you hear from me again—you don't know anything and haven't heard anything from either *Chilly or me!*

So long for a while,

Ken.

Lefty's eyes were fixed on a patch of scarlet sunset that was mirrored on the lake's surface. Bit by bit, Kenneth's letter was being consigned to the water rippling under the float. And when the last scrap dropped from his long tanned fingers he watched it float away with an almost grim determination.

"That's the last of it," he was thinking. "That's what I'll do about the whole business —sort of let it float right out of sight. I defended Ken like the dickens—make Fen think that my brother was a kind of plaster saint in this thing and now it seems I just talked too

soon. Well, I'll do as he asks me now. I won't talk at all. Does he think I want to look like a monkey after the way Fen and Dill have jumped on me? Gosh. . . ."

The clanging of a bell broke the stillness of the sunset hour. He stirred and looked up toward camp. Scouts were pouring out of the many cabins dotting the landscape, and hurrying toward the eats shack. Supper time.

He decided that he was pretty hungry and left the float with squared shoulders and head held high. He had meant to simply squash all thoughts of the letter and he did. But he couldn't stop thinking of his brother. It was a pretty deep hurt to think that this laughing, reckless twin, (whom he had always sworn was the soul of honesty) could be a party to the petty thievery which Chilton Cole was accused of.

"And Mr. Corlett said I ought to sleep soundly tonight, huh?" he said recklessly. "Well, if he said so, *I will*. I'm not going to let anything else spoil my summer—gosh! If that's all Ken cares, why that's all I'll care!"

A few minutes later he entered the eats shack, whistling.

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAIL AGAIN

From all appearances, Lefty must have slept the tranquil sleep of one whose mind is free from all care for he arose the next morning, radiant and happy. He sang himself into his clothes.

"Gee, what's struck you?" Dillon Brown asked, pleasantly sarcastic.

"Nothing, yet," answered Lefty smilingly. "I'm just waiting, that's all." He let his features relax, mockingly sober.

Fenton, who was tugging with his shoe laces, looked up and grinned pleasantly. "You mean you're waiting for the crow to strike you, huh?"

"It looks as if something like that was going to happen," Larry put in from the farther end of the cabin. "I just happened to hear Corlett tell Aiken that Lef has a surprise for us. It was when I was passing them by at campfire last night. He said something about a great idea and that even if it didn't work out it was a good stunt."

"Something about getting the Aiken award, huh?" asked Dillon quickly, his eyes roving from Larry to Lefty.

Larry shrugged his shoulders. "How do I know!" he returned. "You don't think I just stopped and listened, do you? What I heard I just happened to hear when I was passing, that's all."

Dillon looked questioningly at Lefty.

"What would you give to know, Dill?" Lefty asked, teasingly and strode toward the door.

"Aw, do you suppose it's eating me up?" Dillon returned tersely. "I only wanted to know if there was a trick in what you were doing, that's all."

"Kind of a trick," Lefty admitted. "I'll tell you more tonight and then we can kind of compare."

"You mean I won't compare at all," Dillon laughed.

"Sour grapes, Dill," said Fenton justly. "Don't start that now. If he's got something good, can't you admit it without pitying yourself right away? Gee whiz. . . ."

"Say, gosh," Lefty interposed, "I'm not any more sure that what I have is good than I am

that it will snow next Christmas. Good*night*, it may be a fizzle for all I know now!"

The breakfast bell jangled loud and clear in the morning air and Lefty hurried out of the cabin and down the hill intent on getting to the table first. Uppermost in his mind was the thought of Fenton.

"He stuck right up for me, all right," he thought, proudly. "Dill just gets his ideas mixed up, that's all. But, Fen . . . gosh, I do like Fen. If it wasn't for this business about Ken now—well, what's the use? Anyway, I've got to think of that camera this morning. No use worrying about other things."

A half hour later he and Scoutmaster Corlett set off on a brisk hike on the West Trail from camp. Lefty was quiet, apprehensive, about his little device now, for eighteen hours had taken off the keen edge of his hopes. In retrospect, his task seemed bungling and amateurish and he thought of a dozen ways in which he could improve upon it.

"With that field so full of crows I should have made the platform stronger, huh?" he said to his scoutmaster. "Two might have tried to hop on it together and the wire isn't slack enough to

stand that. It would pull over the camera. I should have provided for that, huh?"

"What a fellow you are, Lefferts," the scoutmaster returned with a quiet smile. "Always crossing bridges. Wait until we get up there before you do any more of it. Most fellows would be planning on how to spend that twenty-five dollars. I dare say Dillon would."

"Poor Dill," said Lefty. And he proceeded to tell of the little discussion that had taken place in his cabin before breakfast. In conclusion he said, "Dill's always ready to jump on me, it seems. But I can't get mad at him somehow. I feel sorry for him instead. Gosh, when you think how long he's been trying for that award—he deserves it more than I do. I wouldn't have such patience."

The scoutmaster put his arm about him fraternally. "I like your generous spirit, Lefferts, but in this case I'm afraid it's wasted. Dillon is a queer boy, prone to envy his comrades about trifles. He is inclined to be dull and almost without initiative and for that reason he does not get ahead in scouting the way you have. From experience I know that he does not take kindly to the advice of his elders. That's why

he's still sitting waiting for the crows to come to him. Last summer I gave him a few hints along the line of your own clever idea, but Dillon knew better. He said that he didn't see how a bird as dumb as the crow had the sense to know that he was sitting in the bushes waiting to take his picture."

Lefty laughed unrestrainedly. "And what did you say?"

"I told him that I didn't think the crow was aware of the picture part of it, but that I did know from past experience that a crow knows when there's a human being around even if he's hidden by a dozen bushes. Dillon doesn't believe it yet, evidently."

They trudged on, stepping over little rivulets that were running down the trail as a result of the night's rain. Lefty fairly bounded over them so pleased was he with the trust and confidence that the scoutmaster had placed in him. He felt a glowing sense of satisfaction that a man like Charles Corlett had made such a comrade of him and secretly wished that his uncle would hear of it.

In this happy frame of mind he led the way to the edge of the woods and experienced a quicken-

ing of his pulse at the sight of the trail winding ahead and so through the sunlit meadow beyond. Had the crows come? *The crow?* Was his idea already a failure? He hesitated a moment before plunging into the bushes.

"I'm asking myself two dozen questions all at once, Mr. Corlett," he said with a nervous laugh.

"Oh, come now, Lefferts. You have more faith in yourself than you think," said the scoutmaster encouragingly.

Lefty realized that he had. He pushed aside the tangled mass of brush that bordered the trail and looked in anxiously. Corlett was standing just behind peering over his right shoulder. There was the big rock just as they had placed it and there were all the small rocks on top but no sign was there of the camera.

Lefty gasped. Corlett made a sort of clucking noise with his teeth and stared at the conspicuously bare spot on the rock with astonishment.

"Why, it's gone," said he.

"Sure," said Lefty, conscious of a sudden anger that was foreign to his usually placid nature, "it's absolutely *gone* and I'll find out where it's gone or know the reason *why!*"

CHAPTER XIV

WHO?

"My dear boy, *how?*" asked the scoutmaster, walking toward the rock.

Lefty had been out in the field inspecting his platform and was walking briskly back toward the rock with his eyes centered on the ground.

"Footprints! *See them?*" he returned, his voice strangely tense. "They've been here—the crows, I mean. There's nothing on the platform and I see a few crumbs on the ground but that's all. So that shows they ate it and that's something, isn't it? It's a sure sign they were here, huh?"

"An infallible sign, Lefferts," said the scoutmaster, soothingly. "You've accomplished much by that knowledge, haven't you? Doesn't that comfort you?"

"Gosh, I—say, Mr. Corlett, I don't care about any of that now. I couldn't care—not when there's a thief around! To do a thing like that! Gosh, it's terrible for anyone to do a thing like

that to you! Take your camera—*steal it!*" he added, as if it were too despicable a thing to contemplate.

"And now that it's gone, what am I going to do?" asked the scoutmaster whimsically. "Whoever took it didn't care or question to whom it belonged. It they did. . . ."

"Well, I care!" said Lefty, starting off up the trail.

"Where are you going, Lefferts?"

"I'm going to follow those footprints. I can see them right ahead and across this field. They're fresh ones, too. Only a little while ago, I bet."

"You'll strike Bronson's Lake at the end of the field, Lefferts. If there isn't a boat tied up on this side of the shore you'll either have to swim or hike four miles down to the lake road."

"I'll swim then!" Lefty called back and in a moment his long, lanky legs were all that could be seen of him as he ran.

Not once did he turn to look behind, which was a pity, for he missed the smile of admiration that overspread the face of the scoutmaster. And more was the pity that he couldn't know

the thought that prompted the smile for it would have meant much to him on a future—dark day.

He reached the lake breathless. His keen eyes noted the footprints right down to its very edge, where they had made a very circle in the soft wet clay. And just above the water line was the tell-tale little mound of clay where the hurrying feet of the culprit had scuffed it in pushing the boat out of the mud. A sharp cleft in the bank was the only indication that a boat had been there, but it was indication enough for Lefty.

He wasted not one minute, kicked off his shoes and plunged in the clear waters of the lake. Five minutes later he clambered up on the farther bank, shivering in his wet clothes, but determined. And in the bushes he espied the boat with its prow pointing like an arrow to the footsteps that continued on up the bank and thence through a field. He followed them.

He stumbled over a wild rambler and fell face downward on its prickly thorns. When he picked himself up he was aware that his hands and face had been badly scratched, but he did not let it hinder him for a moment. There was only one

thing that mattered and that was to find the thief and the camera.

Soon he discovered that the tracks left the lake path and made a zigzag trail of their own through a budding orchard. His pulse quickened and his shoulders broadened in a belligerent posture for he sensed that his hunt was nearing its end. The footprints were deeper and closer together—a sign that the culprit had ceased to hurry at this point and was contemplating where to stop.

Lefty also contemplated this and picked his way silently, cautiously. It was delightful and dim and shadowy through the long avenues of fruit trees, and he glanced from right to left with every step. Suddenly he realized that ten feet ahead the tracks turned. . . .

He crept up behind the nearest tree. A shadow moved in the grassy avenue beyond and he waited a tense moment to assure himself that his presence was not suspected. Nothing stirred and except for the occasional twitter of a robin in a nearby tree, all was still. Confident, he peered around the broad trunk of the tree and saw a boy lying indolently in the soft, green grass with his eyes fixed on the bit of blue sky that gleamed

through the tree tops. Alongside of him lay the camera.

In a flash, Lefty stepped out of his hiding place, picked up the camera and stood back, grinning triumphantly.

CHAPTER XV

THE CULPRIT

"Come on," he said in calm, even tones. "I want company back."

"*Back where*?" asked the astonished country boy. He sat up awkwardly and clutched at the grass with his right hand.

"Back where you got this camera from," answered Lefty. His flashing eyes belied his calm tones; then: "You that Bronson feller, huh?"

The boy's eyes widened with amazement. "Uh—uh, huh," he answered at length. "Tim—Tim Bronson—gee, how did you know?"

"You'll find out soon enough," answered Lefty without raising his voice. "It's bad enough that you stole this."

He held the camera up and scrutinized it closely. The trial picture he had taken of the scoutmaster's hand the previous afternoon had brought the indicator over to the left. That much he remembered distinctly. Now it was at the right. Perhaps. . . .

He looked at the wide-eyed Tim and scowled. "Did you touch anything on it—did you try to take a picture with it or anything?"

"Say—say, can they arrest me—can they make trouble for me?" Tim cried out suddenly, ignoring the question that was uppermost in Lefty's mind. "I—I didn't mean to steal it, honest! I just happened to see it there and I thought maybe somebody forgot it, so is it stealing when you take a thing and nobody's around to say they own it?"

"Did you think somebody forgot it when you saw the wire attached, huh?" Lefty returned quietly.

Tim's black eyes lowered and his full mouth drooped sullenly. "I slipped the wire off and that's all I did to it, so is that such a crime?"

"Mr. Corlett will tell you what he thinks of it," answered Lefty.

"I know him," said Tim, boastfully. "I know all those guys over in Donellen, but I never saw you before."

"This is my first summer."

"Gee, I ought to have known that right away. No wonder you act so high and mighty about a little thing. . . ."

"Do you call stealing a *little* thing? Are you a scout?"

"Do you think I want to be one of those guys?" Tim flung back at him evasively.

"Not as long as you take what doesn't belong to you, you don't. Scouting takes those ideas out of a feller's head."

A peculiar thought came to Lefty in the wake of that statement; a thought that completely refuted what he had just said. *Did* scouting take those ideas out of a fellow's head? Out of Kenneth's head? Out of Chilton's head? In both those instances it did not seem so, and yet in his heart, he felt convinced that scouting wasn't to blame. There was a twist in it somewhere. . . .

He gave his head a peremptory shake and sent the unmanageable lock of hair up to its proper sphere. "Come on," he said, "Mr. Corlett's waiting. He can tell you what I can't."

"What's the idea?" asked Tim, thoroughly frightened. "What can he tell me? You've got the camera, so what more. . . ."

"Come on, Tim," said Lefty quietly. "I never did like to argue."

Tim's black eyes flashed defiance for only a moment and then he rose. To be sure, Lefty was

still smiling but his eyes betrayed not a sign of mirth and his chin was set at a determined angle. The country boy stepped forward sullenly but none the less obediently.

"I'll get hunk on you for this," he mumbled, as they walked down the lake path. "I never let a guy order me around and get away with it. Gee whiz!"

Lefty walked on as if he had not heard. Presently he crossed over into the bushes and straight toward the boat. "Come on and take the other end, Tim," he said pleasantly. "I'm not crazy about swimming with my clothes on if I can help it. Another thing, they're half dry now and it would be a shame to treat them to another ducking."

Tim stood gaping for a moment, a sort of admiration lighting his face. "A—a—how did you know where that boat was?" he asked. "Gee, I thought I had that hid fine."

"Sure, you did," Lefty laughed. "But I found it just the same, huh? And I found you too, huh? Now you figure that out, Tim."

"Aw, you scout guys are always patting yourselves on the back," said Tim, lapsing back into his sullen mood. "What's just nothing but luck

you try and make me believe is scouting. Gee, that's how you guys explain everything—*scouting!* That makes me laugh, all right!"

Lefty gave him a measured glance and smiled. "Laugh all you want to, Tim," he said pleasantly. "And say what you want to about scouting because anyhow I don't have to explain scouting—it explains itself, sort of."

Tim could think of no fitting retort and so contented himself with a sullen scowl and a shrug of his shoulders. Nevertheless he helped Lefty with the boat and soon they were rowing across the placid surface of the lake.

As they made fast the boat on the farther side, Tim glared angrily at Lefty's smiling face. "See here, you," he said, "what are you trying to do—make a fool of me or something? What's the idea of dragging me to Mr. Corlett, huh? You got your camera, like I said before, haven't you?" His voice trembled a little and it was evident that fear, rather than anger, prompted this heated outburst.

Lefty waited a few seconds before he spoke, then: "Listen, Tim," said he, quietly, "I've got the camera, yes, but it's no fault of yours. You've kind of made yourself look like a—a

thief (there, I've said it!) and you can't deny it. Now your best bet is to not make yourself look like that any more. And you can do it if you want to, because Mr. Corlett isn't hard to convince. He likes fellers that don't forget how to admit when they're wrong and sorry for it, too. That's all I've got to say."

Tim, evidently, had nothing more to say either for he followed Lefty the rest of the way in silence.

CHAPTER XVI

TALK

"LEFFERTS, I must compliment you," said Scoutmaster Corlett, when he and Lefty were on their way back to camp. "That was an admirable bit of scouting you performed. Talk about your bloodhounds!"

"When there's only one trail to follow it's easy enough," said Lefty modestly. "I wish all trails were as easy as that. Gosh, it was nothing."

"Nonsense," said the scoutmaster heartily. "Your spirit alone was tremendous. And the main thing—you got what you went after, didn't you?"

"You bet," Lefty answered quietly. "I can't stand anything like that, Mr. Corlett. Stealing, I mean. No matter what he meant or what he didn't mean, it amounts to the same thing in the end. I get mad no matter who that happens to but because it was your camera I was madder still. You're too good to fellers to have any-

one do anything like that to you. I just wouldn't stand for it, that's all."

The scoutmaster smiled understandingly. "You're a bully little champion, Lefferts," said he. "And you're thoroughly honest. There'll be something wrong somewhere if you don't capture some honor badge before you leave here this summer."

"There'll be something wrong with me, you mean," said Lefty smilingly. "Anyway, what's most on my mind is the picture. If it doesn't come out, why, the other roll I put in will *have* to catch it."

"You set the camera again then, eh?" asked the scoutmaster.

"I'll say I did," answered Lefty. "I'm not taking any chances—there *has* to be one good one out of two rolls of film. I set the camera again while you had Tim on the carpet."

Scoutmaster Corlett chuckled. "On the carpet is putting it rather strongly, eh, Lefferts? He looked so frightened I didn't have the heart to give him anything but good advice and a little lecture on the evils of taking things that didn't belong to him."

"Did he apologize to you?" Lefty asked.

"Oh, to be sure," answered the scoutmaster. "I dare say he would have apologized a hundred times had I asked him for he was breathlessly happy that I didn't turn him over to the law."

"He ought to be—it's lucky for him you didn't," Lefty said, with righteous indignation. "He kicked like everything because I dragged him back here—he thought it ought to be enough that I found the camera. Gosh!"

"Hmph, no wonder he looked at you so belligerently," laughed the scoutmaster. "I caught him a couple of times looking your way and they weren't exactly kindly glances."

"I should worry," said Lefty. "Anyway, I couldn't have done anything to him—it was your camera."

"Evidently he didn't figure it out that way," the scoutmaster said, smiling. "It was you that discovered him and therein lies the difference. But he'll have forgotten his anger by now."

"Maybe," Lefty returned, "but if he saw me again he'd remember it quick enough, I bet. He has kind of a scrappy look, Tim has. Don't you think so?"

Scoutmaster Corlett smiled. "I've never noticed that," he answered, "but I have noticed

that he has a rather wistful way of looking at our boys when he comes to camp. Indeed, he grudgingly admitted to Counsellor Rawlins one time that he'd like to have the freedom of a Donellen scout for just one summer. Farmer Bronson keeps the boy working pretty hard, I've heard."

"Gosh, the poor kid," said Lefty sympathetically. "I didn't know that. Maybe that's why he was tempted, huh?"

"About the camera? Yes, that's the reason, no doubt. The boy seldom has a penny to spend nor an hour in which to spend it if he had one. It's common gossip that his father is pretty niggardly."

"No wonder that camera looked so good to him!" Lefty exclaimed thoughtfully. "Goodnight, now I can see why he looked so happy when I caught him lying in the orchard. He was even whistling."

"That's the only time he has to play, I guess," explained the scoutmaster. "He must look forward to his errands to camp. Columbia never fails to treat him to some tempting dish. Aikens and Rawlins and myself usually contribute some

movie money although I'm at a loss to know where he can find the time to spend it."

"Gosh, but when you were so good to him you wouldn't think. . . ." Lefty began.

"I know, Lefferts," said the scoutmaster patiently. "But you see Tim couldn't possibly have known who that camera belonged to. And even if he did there still remains the question of his father. It's he who needs good advice and I'm going up there some day to give him a generous portion of it."

"Boy, that sounds good," said Lefty, enthusiastically. "And while you're dishing out advice maybe I can talk to Tim about scouting and things, huh?"

"Oh, so you've invited yourself along to the conference, eh?" laughed Scoutmaster Corlett.

"Bet your life," Lefty answered. "Tim doesn't seem like a hard feller to get along with —with the right kind of treatment."

"Well, you try it, Lefferts," said the scoutmaster. "I'll stick to my job and you stick to yours. Between us we ought to succeed."

"*Ought to?*" Lefty repeated amusedly. "*We will!* That's all there is to it."

CHAPTER XVII

DETERMINED

"Aiken's going to Ticonderoga this morning," said Scoutmaster Corlett after breakfast the next day. "There's some shopping I could do and then there's that film of yours to be taken in. How do you feel about coming?"

"Mind if I don't come?" Lefty returned eagerly.

"Of course not," the scoutmaster answered, smiling. "Don't you care about it?"

"Sure, I do, but there's that other film in the camera at the field. I'm kind of anxious to see what's happened there since last night. I'll feel better if I go and look and in the meantime that other one can be developed, huh? Gosh, it'd be great if I got two good ones."

"You're all keyed up to the venture, aren't you," the scoutmaster said.

"Sure, I want to beat Dill if I can," said Lefty truthfully. "It isn't the twenty-five dollars

award now that I'm after—it's the excitement of who gets the first picture."

The scoutmaster smiled. "I knew it would get you. Well, it's a good excitement, Lefferts, and you deserve success. Just for luck I'll say a few abba dabbas over the film before I hand it in at the drugstore down there, eh?"

They both laughed, then parted, the scoutmaster going toward the counsellor's waiting car and Lefty toward the West Trail.

It was a perfect day; blue sky and sunshine and a soft warm wind that touched lightly at Lefty's tanned cheek every now and then. He felt in tune with it all, yet strangely enough, when he attempted to whistle not one bit of sound could he force through his pursed lips. There was, he admitted grudgingly, something lacking.

To be sure, Scoutmaster Corlett had been just like a comrade during the last few days. And then there was the award to look forward to, albeit he knew that its glory would not be lasting. A day at the most and he would have to look to something else beside crows for diversion. And there wasn't the thrill in looking for diversion

without a comrade who talked the language of his own age.

He felt mean and false in that thought for he was conscious that he had Scoutmaster Corlett directly in mind. Disloyal as he felt, he could not help wishing that someone else (Fenton, for instance) would feel the same toward him as the kindly and understanding scoutmaster.

He had felt the loss of Fenton's friendship more than he liked to admit. To be sure, they had never been bosom friends; his uncle found too many tasks for him to do to permit a real intimacy with anyone. But at those infrequent delightful moments when he was at liberty he could always depend on Fenton. Indeed, he had only to whistle and Fenton came running. And now. . . .

He pursed his lips and smiled sardonically. He could whistle his head off now for Fenton was acting his statement to the letter. He had said, "You don't trust me . . . we better not hang around together until you know enough to tell me . . . I'll be thinking of it all the time if I go around with you, so that's that." And that *was* that—it had spoiled a great part of his fun already. The fellows were still wondering

about that day in New York—he could feel that they were, every time they ate or talked together. All because of his own brother. . . .

He gave his head a violent twist and sent the errant lock on his forehead back in place. He knew that in less than a minute it would come tumbling down again but he derived a sort of pleasure from twisting his head about to meet the requirements of his unmanageable hair. It seemed to fit his mood and helped to blot out the memory of Fenton's coolness.

Within a half mile of the field he became aware that the wind had suddenly changed and was blowing east. He frowned with disappointment, lifted his head and squinted at the sun as it disappeared under some gathering clouds.

A change in the weather would go far toward spoiling his plans for he had decided to spend at least part of the day at the field and the rest of the time in hunting out Tim Bronson at the farm. If it rained he could do neither, and he would be forced to go back to camp and spend a solitary afternoon reading in his cabin or go to recreation shack where the fellows were sure to gather on such a day. And the latter course did not appeal to him for he would not escape the

hurt, smiling scrutiny of Fenton's eyes. It was a new mode of punishment that his friend had affected within the past few days and Lefty was beginning to find it irksome.

He shrugged his shoulders indifferently and followed the trail through the woods. Presently he pushed his way in through the brush and approached the big rock with bated breath. Everything was just as he had left it and as his eyes fell upon the shutter he whistled contentedly.

"Well, it's a picture of something," he said, and reached over for the camera. "Even if it's only a sparrow that was snapped or a frog it's better than nothing. Gosh. . . ."

A bit of white paper fluttered over the rock as he took up the camera. He watched it in its aimless course, first indifferently then curiously, for the damp breeze blowing in through the trees turned it completely around revealing a large scrawling sort of handwriting across its face.

He leaned forward and picked it up.

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAPPED

He sat down on the edge of the rock resting the camera in his lap and studying the little note with puzzled brow. Despite its illiterate scrawl, he managed to decipher it. It read:

> A shovul is in field neer yor zeezaw what you put thair for the crows so pick up the shovul and see what hapens.

There was no signature, nothing. Just those few hastily written words. He read it over twice, then looked out into the field where his rudely constructed platform stood.

His curiosity got the better of him and he left the rock and stepped out of the brush, stumbling over the wire that had so recently connected the shutter and the platform. A smile of amusement lighted his face at the thought of the mysterious writer of the note terming it "zeezaw." He was prepared to take the matter as a joke until he discovered that a shovel *was* lying on the ground not ten feet away from the platform.

The area about the shining steel implement appeared to be freshly plowed, perhaps twenty feet in circumference.

"Just a joke," thought Lefty again. "I bet one of the farm hands is starting to plow up the field and thought of the note as a gentle hint to get my 'zeezaw' off the field. That's what it is, I bet."

He chuckled and reached for the shovel. But before he had a chance to grasp the wooden handle there was a sudden sound of splintering wood and in a breath-taking second he felt the earth give way beneath him.

He tried to cry out and instinctively clawed the air but was hurtled downward as if he were a feather. Whether or not he descended head first he could never remember. The one definite sensation he had was that of being hurled bodily into a dank smelling black pit and then whirled precipitately around when his head struck something hard and cold. Darkness closed in around him. He felt that he was sinking, sinking, sinking. . . .

He became slowly conscious of that familiar dank smell in his nostrils. His head ached furiously when he tried to think where he was and

what had happened to him. His body too felt sore and bruised as he attempted to move. Things seemed horribly confused and muddled in his mind and a few minutes passed before he was able to determine the surroundings in which he found himself. His eyes penetrated the dusk of the eerie place and widened, fearfully.

It was not, after all, some chaotic nightmare through which he had passed. The black, dank smelling pit was very, very real. Not without effort did he raise himself from the oozy ground and look about, horrified.

It did not require more than a glance for him to realize that the pit into which he had fallen was an abandoned well. "Trapped," he murmured wearily and scrutinized the generous collection of rubbish which lay about on all sides.

He noted a deep puddle of green looking water in a depression on the farther side of the well. Probably some seepage from the recent rains, he thought. It came to him then that he had observed a slab-like rock near the little platform, the previous day. Perhaps he had unconsciously observed it before then, but it had seemed so much a part of the natural landscape that he had given it no particular thought.

"If I had I would have looked it over and seen that it was used to cover this rotten place," he cried despairingly. "Some scout I am to have been lured into a trap like this! *Gosh!*"

He managed to get to his feet, but had to steady himself against the slimy wall, his head throbbed so painfully. Something tickled the tip of his ear and he started, only to find that it was but a dangling bit of the rank growth whose tentacles clung to the crevices the length and breadth of the brick wall. Twigs distorted by confinement and other vegetation of that strange color of sunless growth were shooting up through the little piles of rubbish at his feet. Only moss and mold had the temerity to creep right up to the opening.

Lefty looked up, fearfully. The threatening gray skies gave but little of its light into the well. Indeed, at times, the heavens seemed but a mirage to him for the smooth, slimy wall gave no promise of escape from that loathsome place into the sweet smelling light of day.

He cried out despairingly and banged his bruised hands against the clammy wall. The note! Who could have thought of such a fiendish joke? What had he done to anyone that they

should delight to see him hurt and bruised? He might have fractured his skull, he thought, as he felt the big painful lump on his head. It wasn't a joke; it was. . . .

His foot kicked something and it rolled over toward the edge of the puddle. It rolled so much like a ball that his curiosity was immediately aroused and despite the discomfort to his head and body he stooped over and picked it up.

A ball it certainly was, enveloped by a sheet of muddy notepaper, the whole held intact by an elastic band, which Lefty slipped off. He smoothed out the damp paper and even in the eternal twilight of the old well he could discern that there was writing on one side. Something about the rude illiterate scrawl seemed familiar —oddly familiar.

He put his hand up to his aching head and raised himself on tiptoe in order to hold the flimsy paper nearer to the meagre ray of light that reached only half way down the shaft. He could just decipher the three large letters at the bottom of the sheet which spelled out T-I-M. That was all that the scanty light allowed him, but it was enough.

He thrust the paper into his pocket and put

both hands to his head. It took no great stretch of the imagination for him to fit the pieces of the puzzle together. Tim it most certainly was who had prepared the trap for him, knowing that he would be coming back for the camera that day. And Tim it was who had thrown that ball there, perhaps to brazenly inform his victim of the reason for this terrible practical joke.

Tim's threat of the day before suddenly came back to Lefty's tortured senses. *"I'll get hunk on you for this. . . . I never let a guy order me around and get away with it!"* Well, his words proved true and he had carried them out.

Lefty wondered if the farm boy's mind was so twisted as to have a murderous intent in playing this cruel joke upon him. He shuddered at the thought. But no, he must mean to come and rescue him out of the filthy hole. No sane, normal mind could intend otherwise. He would know that there wasn't any possible way of climbing up that slippery wall to freedom. Why, he had even left his scout knife over on the rock when he cut the wire from the shutter. Why, he was absolutely helpless! Why. . . .

He pressed his throbbing head against the slimy wall and groaned.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE WELL

THE minutes passed with the precision of hours. Lefty looked hopelessly from the well bottom to the bit of sky that frowned so stolidly above the opening. There was something mocking and smug in its immobility that seemed to dispel all promise of hope for him.

Time and again he ran his hands around the damp wall groping hopefully for some definite fissure in which he could raise himself out of the mire and rubbish of the well bottom. He hobbled painfully over to the edge of the big puddle and examined the wall on that side. But there was nothing to be gained there either. A hissing oozy sound of the soft mire giving way under the weight of his body was all he got for his pains.

He stepped back quickly and saw that the depression his feet had made was claimed precipitately by the green water of the puddle. It writhed and wriggled like a serpent into the area until the puddle became a miniature pool.

He watched it indifferently, keeping to the farther side of the well. He was aware of a distant booming sound and when he raised his eyes toward the opening of the shaft he saw a flash of lightning zigzag across the sky. Soon after he heard that unmistakable sound of rain tap-tapping down the shaft.

Still the minutes dragged by, still the rain tap-tapped its way into the well. The inactivity of the situation began to irk him and he stamped his foot impatiently for want of some ingenious inspiration that would solve his problem.

In the midst of his musings his eye lighted upon that implement of duplicity, the shovel, which was lying in the rubbish at his feet. Heretofore he had avoided glancing at it, having summarily disposed of its hateful presence when first he took account of his dismal surroundings. He had even derived a certain pleasure in seeing the new, shining thing lying ingloriously among a heap of rags that were green with mold.

Now he viewed it with a certain interest and wondered whether it could not now redeem itself by helping him out of his sorry plight. Acting instantly upon the thought, he pulled it out

of the rubbish and sent a myriad of slimy slugs scampering in all directions.

He shuddered visibly and wiped his hands on his bespattered knickers. But his determination to be free was so great that for the moment he forgot his aching head and body, everything.

He plunged the sharp steel into the ground as firmly as was possible, then put a foot on either side of the stick hoping that by this little elevation he would discover some crevice that he could not reach otherwise. But as soon as his full weight pressed down upon the sharp steel there came that familiar sound of the oozing mire and the shovel sank down to its handle.

Lefty jumped down and was dismayed to see water trickling up in the depression that the shovel had made. He pulled it out and tried patting down the mire but it was a futile effort. In point of fact, it invited disaster for the water spread over the well bottom with alarming rapidity.

He watched it not without some trepidation and shifted to the only partly dry spot in that dank bottom. It was only a few minutes, however, before the icy water trickled about the

soles of his shoes. He stood, terrified, and let it trickle.

It chilled him terribly at first but once it had soaked inside his shoes he became used to it and turned his attention once more to the frowning, slimy wall surrounding him. He let his hands trail over every inch and turned away from it in despair.

Minute after minute he stood in frozen silence watching the water creeping around his ankles. Now and again he would cast a hopeless glance in the direction of the opening with the dismal thought that he had heard Mr. Corlett say that it was a rarity for any of the Bronsons to come that way. Tim had been that way and gone. Apparently gone for good, so far as he was concerned.

It would be long after supper before Mr. Corlett would be concerned enough about him to round up the boys for a search. By the time they reached the field it might be too late. He looked down at the slowly creeping water. At the rate it was going it would be above his head by night. He couldn't escape it.

He could stand it no longer; fate was holding him at a disadvantage. He could not fight an

insidious thing like this—there was absolutely no way of striking back, scout or no scout. His hands were tied, as it were, and the thought of it made him want to shriek out the unfairness of it all.

He did, and with a vengeance.

CHAPTER XX

ABOUT TIM

"How can I get out of here?" cried he. "How can I—*how can I?*"

"Eh?" came a strange voice. "What's that—who's that?"

Lefty looked up toward the opening and stared, speechless, at the head and shoulders of a man who leaned over it. The strap of the stranger's overall had slipped off his shoulder and dangled loosely from the blue denim shirt sleeve.

"That ain't you, Tim, is it?" he queried, in a slow country drawl.

"No, it isn't *Tim!*" Lefty called, angrily. "I wish it was. Hurry, mister, please hurry and get me out! There's water in here and it's over my ankles."

"Eh? *Water?*" asked the man, with exasperating slowness.

"Yes, *water!*" replied Lefty. "It's coming in all the time. Please hurry!"

"Water, water," the man called, talking more to himself than to Lefty. "Wa'al, I didn' think 'twould come in so soon as thet. Naow jest a minute, young feller. I got the ladder right here and I'll fetch her down to ye. I had a time lookin' fer it—it wuz hid back in them bushes an' I calc'late it wasn't nobuddy but Tim what did it. Him an' his fool tricks."

"Well, I'm here on account of one of them, too," said Lefty wearily.

"Eh, yes?" the man inquired pleasantly, as the ladder appeared through the opening. "Yuh fall in?"

"No, Tim tricked me in, I guess," Lefty answered, watching the ladder's descent with joyous relief. "He camouflaged the opening with dirt and sticks and twigs and I stepped on them. They're all down here now floating around. He left a note under the camera I have back there in the bushes and told me to pick up a shovel and see what happened. Well, you see what happened. I cracked my head and bruised myself, but I'm all right, I guess."

"Wa'al, wa'al, that wuz a shame," the man said, sympathetically. "That's Tim all right. Lan' sakes, though, yuh could o' been killed."

"Wait till you see the bump on my head," Lefty laughed with sheer relief. "I got hold of her now, mister."

"Wa'al, jest steady her a little and sing out when yuh git her plumb down thar."

"How can I get it plumb when even the shovel sank way in when I tried to stand on it?"

"Wa'al," answered the man, after a moment's contemplation, "ef she's as bad as that don't try an' shove her down. Jest git it firm and I'll hold her er bust. Jest go easy on the way up an' save yer weight as much as ye kin."

Lefty would have parted with an arm or a leg to save his weight in order to get out of that loathsome place. But he had to do neither for his rescuer kept the ladder steady until he scrambled out of the opening and stood safely on the rain-swept field.

"Phew," he said gratefully, "I'm sure glad you came along. I'd rather be rain-soaked than well-soaked, believe me."

The man pulled up the ladder slowly, set it carefully on the ground and eyed Lefty quizzically. "Wa'al, I'm glad I did come, an' 'twould be a turrible thing ef I hadn't. Tim goes too far ter do a thing like that. He knowed I

wouldn't be here as a rule in sech a storm, thet's why he did it. But I can't understand why he didn't come back ter git yuh out. He ain't 'xactly cruel—he plays jokes on folks, but he wouldn' leave yer helpless an' not come back ter fish yer out. That's what I can't understand."

"Then you're his father, huh?" Lefty asked respectfully.

The man's weather-beaten face crinkled in an amiable smile. "That's who I am," he said. "And you're th' feller from the camp what marched Tim back here yestiddy 'count o' that camera, eh? He told me straightway 'bout it and said he wuz sorry and even ef he wuz hoppin' mad at you fer showin' him up thet way he 'lowed you wuz a purty good scout. Thet's jest what he said."

Lefty laughed outright and walked over to the rock and sat down. Mr. Bronson followed him, looking speculatively at the far horizon. After a moment he sat down beside the scout.

"You know, Mr. Bronson," said Lefty, with a chuckle, "I can't feel mad at Tim since you've told me that. He's a pretty good scout himself for going to you that way and owning up to

things. Gosh, I suppose I can't blame him for wanting to get hunk on me. Well, he did and I could have come out worse."

"Wa'al, it's good it wasn't worse," said the farmer. "Tim's truthful, I must say. 'Nother thing, he didn't know I struck that spring in th' well bottom last week or he wouldn' o' though o' sech a joke. Did yuh notice a puddle when yuh got down thar?"

"You mean when I first came to?" Lefty returned, smiling. "I was knocked silly for a few minutes and then I noticed it. Why?"

"Wa'al, I heered 'bout springs bein' thar an' I dug 'cause we might use it fer irrigation sometime," Mr. Bronson explained.

"I dug 'bout seven feet whar that thar puddle wuz an' water began tricklin in so I s'pose it filled up and softened the rest o' the ground so's when yuh walked on it, it jest natcherally sunk. Wa'al, we'll hev ter do something 'bout it, but meantime I'll pull the' slab over it so's Tim can't play any more jokes on anybody else."

He walked over to the bushes in that slow, deliberate way and pulled out the heavy slab and started to drag it toward the well opening. Lefty jumped up and helped, despite his aches

and pains and Mr. Bronson's vociferous objections.

"Where do you suppose Tim is now?" Lefty asked curiously, after the slab had been put firmly in its place.

"Like as not loafin' in Cortland," answered Mr. Bronson. "He wuz sent thar for supplies—jest a few things what didn't need any truck to go and git 'em. That's why I let him go and besides it looked so stormy an' all. Besides he likes ter shop but he should o' been back an hour ago. That's how I come ter git by this way. I wanted ter see ef he wuz loafin't in th' woods. Maybe he's comin' th' long way round th' other side o' th' lake 'count o' trippin yuh inter th' well. But that ain't like Tim not ter come back an' see ef you're all right. I can't understand it."

"Do you think he was hiding somewhere around here when I took my big spill?" Lefty asked whimsically.

Mr. Bronson adjusted his wide-brimmed sun hat to keep the rain from running down his nose and assured Lefty that he never could be sure what his mischievous son was likely to do. He reiterated, however, that Tim was not cruel

and he could not understand why he hadn't come back to see how the joke had gone.

"He's jest that thoughtless, though, he didn't think how yuh could bang yuh head and bruise yourself like yuh have," said Mr. Bronson, worriedly and apologetically. "I s'pose he thought 'twould be nice an' soft fer a fall."

"It would have been if I hadn't hit the wall on my way down," Lefty laughed. "But as long as I didn't sink in that seven foot puddle I haven't any kick coming. I'm feeling better now, anyway."

Mr. Bronson stared at him admiringly. "Wa'al, wa'al, but yer forgivin', I must say," said he. "Is that what them scout folks teach ye?"

"Sure," Lefty smiled. "A scout's got to be cheerful and take the knocks the same way."

"Hmph," said the farmer thoughtfully, "it wouldn' hurt Tim none to be one, then. It would take some o' them tricks out o' his head too, mebbe."

"Well, he'd make a good scout, I bet anything," said Lefty. "He's truthful and that's one good thing. Look how he came to you about the camera!"

Farmer Bronson looked across the field where a path ran on into the woods. He explained that it led out to the branch line railroad tracks and thence to the little village of Cortland where the errant Tim must now be loafing. A bit of sunlight peeping over the dark clouds and the sudden cessation of rain strengthened that suspicion in the farmer's mind. He added, however, perhaps for the twentieth time, that he couldn't understand why the mischievous imp hadn't come back to the well.

Lefty suggested that Tim might have forgotten and after assuring the worried man that he would some time visit the farm, he watched him hurry back toward the lake to see if Tim "had taken the long way around, after all."

Lefty looked at the disreputable condition of his clothes and shoes, and smiled. His head still ached enough to warrant his almost hating the thought of the mischievous Tim, but for some strange reason he didn't. Instead, he had a sneaking admiration for him. Any boy, he reasoned, who could go straight to his father and tell a story straight like that camera story, must have good stuff in him somewhere.

"Maybe I'm crazy," he said aloud, "but if I

met him now I'd rather shake hands with him than bawl him out. Gosh, I know he doesn't deserve it and yet again he does. I don't know, but I kind of like Tim, now that I come to think of it. Yep, he isn't so bad."

And that was Lefty all over.

CHAPTER XXI

THE JOKER

He sat for a few moments musing in this vein when suddenly he bethought himself of Tim's note resting in his pocket. The lack of light could not now make that rude scrawl illegible for he had the vast sky above his head and a triumphant sun breaking through the wide billowy clouds.

He chuckled and pulled out the note. It read:

> Hope you have a nice, big fall. Try and see if you can do any trakin or whatever you call follerin a trail. I'm goin to take a nice walk along the branch line traks and pick berrys so when I get filled I'll come back and give you sum and get the lader to let you get out. By that time I won't be mad at you no more. Anyhow see if you can do any trakin now ——
>
> Like fun you can—Ha! Ha! Ha!
>
> Tim Bronson.

Lefty thrust the note back in his pocket and started for the path that led east through the woods. A strange sense of foreboding urged

him on and he forgot his aching head and bruised body under the spell of it.

I'll come back and give you some and get the ladder to let you get out! Those words raced through his mind interminably. Tim had promised to come back and Tim was truthful! His father had definitely acknowledged that. Why, then, had he not come back?

Lefty hurried as fast as his aching head permitted. He dodged the dripping branches of trees, not caring to get a fresh soaking just as he was beginning to get dry. He had completely forgotten about luncheon. Four good-sized sandwiches, a generous piece of cake and an apple reposed in his bulging pocket. Columbia knew the way to a scout's heart.

The sun flashed gaily through the trees and Lefty judged by the shadow that it was a good deal past noontime; half past twelve, at least. He reached in his pocket and drew forth one of the sandwiches, munching it hurriedly just as he came out of the woods.

The branch line tracks ran north and southeast, the mountains rising formidably just beyond. The sun sent its dazzling rays down the length of gleaming steel and now and again

some sweet-throated bird filled the soft, still air with its golden notes.

Lefty jumped out and viewed the silent place, anxiously. The road bed curved abruptly, not a quarter of a mile southeast, and seemed almost to curve straight into the mountainside. For some reason, which he was at a loss to define, he hurried toward it.

He munched a second sandwich and managed to take a nibble or two of the apple before he came into view of the bend. Indeed, he had the last nibble in the process of digestion when the sight of a boy standing between the tracks brought his heart into his throat.

It was Tim.

"Is that you—*you?*" the boy cried in a voice of anguish. "You got out and all?" He watched the scout in amazement.

Lefty sprinted forward. "Sure, it's me, Tim," he called. "Your father fished me out. What's the. . . ."

"My foot's caught in the switch," Tim interposed in agonized tones. "I think it's broken or somethin' an' the twelve-fifty special will come along an'. . . ."

Lefty went up to the boy and stopped, breath-

less. "And you've been standing here all this time?" he asked, bending quickly down and inspecting the imprisoned foot.

"Since ten o'clock," Tim replied. "That's the time the switchman turns it down at Tuttle's Tower and then he goes to sleep till the special comes through and he does it because there ain't only two specials come through here a day." He took a deep breath and there was a suggestion of mistiness in his eyes which he promptly rubbed away with the back of his hands.

"How far is it to Tuttle's Tower?" Lefty asked quickly.

"Mebbe a mile," groaned Tim. "Gee, I'm sorry I got hunk on you like that. It was. . . ."

"Listen, forget about it," Lefty interposed, with a calm that he was far from feeling. "Can't you move it—can't you—here, let me try pulling your foot out of your shoe?"

"You can't," said Tim hopelessly. "I've tried a hundred times, I bet. It only makes it hurt worse. You'll just have to go away and let the special plow me down. They won't see me on account of the bend here and they won't stop for you because they'll think it's me playing a joke on them again."

"What do you mean?" Lefty asked.

"I fooled the engineer of the special one day because I went up above the bend here a little way and waved my arms like a danger signal," Tim admitted, despairingly. "I just wanted to see if I could make him stop and he did. Gee, he was so mad I had to sneak off through the woods and home a mile. . . ."

"Oh, my gosh!" Lefty moaned. Then: "Doesn't she slow up any for the bend?"

"Not so's you'd notice it," Tim said sardonically, "What time do you think it is?"

"It's after—after half past twelve, Tim," Lefty admitted. "It must be—yes, it's even past twenty minutes to one. Something's got to be done quick, do you realize that?"

"Sure," Tim countered bravely. "Step off the track so's there won't be two of us hit."

Lefty looked at him admiringly and turned swiftly away. He ran north along the track, looking right and left. Suddenly he spied a clump of dead brush and twigs in between the trees. They had escaped enough of the recent storm to serve his purpose and as he lifted an armful of them out and set them on the track he found that the under part was perfectly dry.

With breathtaking haste he dragged armful after armful of the crackling stuff onto the track, listening with every step for the distant shrill of the locomotive's whistle. Surely, it would whistle for the bend, he thought.

Every good scout carries matches and Lefty was no exception to the rule. He brought them out of his pocket and lighted a heap of brush and twigs, prayerfully. It wouldn't make as big a fire as he wished, but it would have to do under the circumstances.

The blaze flared straight up into the clear air and Lefty heard Tim's shrill voice calling appealingly. But he kept his back toward the boy, determinedly. There could be no turning back from his purpose.

Tooo-oot! Ah, at last, Lefty thought. It sounded not so far away and he welcomed it. His hasty fire would be burning nicely by the time the train was upon him. He stepped down the embankment and ran a few feet along the edge of the woods, gathering more dead wood. Then with equal haste he flung them onto the sizzling pyre. It made not such a poor display, after all.

Too-oot! Nearer and nearer it came. Now

WE MUST STOP THAT TRAIN.

Lefty Leighton. *Page* 139

he could feel the rails vibrating; now he could see the shining nose of the great steel monster as it swung into view not a half mile away.

His muscles grew taut and he took his place directly behind the flaming fire. Tim was screaming hoarsely, but he paid no heed. The locomotive rushed on, nearer and nearer. Then it shrieked out one great ear-splitting blast, for the bend.

Lefty got another inspiration in that moment. He began to jump up and down like some great, gawky jack-in-the-box. But he had no thought of how he would look to anyone save the engineer of that oncoming locomotive. The man *must* see him—he *must* get the impression that someone was being burned alive in that bonfire. *He must stop that train!*

Now it was bearing down, closer and closer. Its steely roar drowned out Tim's pleading shrieks. Lefty was glad of that. He closed his eyes and jumped, jumped. The smoke of the burning wood was getting into his throat and making him cough. The jumping made his head ache worse and worse and his bruised body fairly groaned under this singular treatment.

But still he jumped. . . .

CHAPTER XXII

GOOD TURNS FOR BAD

LEFTY was beginning to think that his efforts were pitifully bungling and amateurish when he suddenly heard a terrific screeching and grinding. His heart raced with joy for that sound could mean only one thing—the great emergency brake. In a flash the locomotive ceased her roaring, puffing impatiently where she had stopped not one hundred and fifty feet away.

Lefty stood where he was and watched the engineer climb down from his cab. The man was short and plump and as he walked toward Lefty's fire, he pushed his grimy little cap back upon his head with a portentous gesture. His sharp little eyes had already discovered that the tall youth was in no way a part of the flames.

But Lefty was ready for him, too. He stepped out in full view of the little man and smiled his broadest smile. "You've saved a feller's life, mister," he panted. "Honest, this is no fool-

ing this time. He's down at the bend and he got his foot caught in the switch since ten o'clock and I just came along a little while ago and I had to do something to save him so I thought of this." Poor Lefty had to fairly gulp for breath.

The little engineer approached and the scowl on his round, red face was nothing short of menacing. For a moment he glowered at poor Lefty and finally scratched his head, pushing his cap still farther back until it looked as if another touch would send it flying.

"Ye sure ye ain't lyin' ter me?" he asked in a high, piping voice. "Ye sure?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die," said Lefty, convincingly. "Gosh, do you think I'd go to all this trouble, mister? He's down at the bend, you can see for yourself."

"Can't pull the foot out, eh?" asked the man in softer tones.

"Nope, we tried," answered Lefty truthfully.

The fireman, brakemen and conductors had now joined them and soon the first contingent of curious passengers were hurrying up to the scene. The engineer frowned.

"This is a pretty kittle o' fish," he said to

the little group of trainmen. "Now we'll have tuh wait till they get word at the tower."

"I'll go, mister," said Lefty eagerly. "Kind of, it's my fault, so I'll go. I can run awful fast and it isn't far. Just see that Tim is all right when the switch opens, will you? He isn't such a bad kid—he just likes to play jokes sometimes but not this time, he didn't. This was an honest-to-goodness one, so will you?"

The engineer's grimy countenance became wreathed in smiles. He gave his head one last vigorous scratch and succeeded in sending the little cap flying to the roadbed. The fireman picked it up and without formality of any kind set it back in its accustomed place at a nonchalant angle. But the little man paid no heed to anything but Lefty.

"Yuh're a fine boy, so ye are," he said simply, "and ye did a fine thing fer that imp at the switch. He kin thank ye all th' rest o' his days fer that fine idea o' yours to make a fire. I wuz half a mind ter race me train right through it, thinkin' it wuz only another one o' th' lad's devilish jokes, but all of a sudden I sees ye jumpin' up an' down as if ye were burnin' at th' stake or somethin'. Well, run

along, me boy, and git to Tuttle's as fast as yer long legs kin carry ye. We'll take care that yer friend down there will be safe an' sound 'till ye git back. Ye kin take him home, eh?''

Lefty could do anything then. He could have beaten the world, he thought, so high were his spirits. And as he raced along the ties toward Tuttle's Tower he had that sense of having done something well. His aching head, his bruises were all a part of the great adventure and though his own life and Tim's life had been at stake he gloried in the exhilaration that it had brought him. Donellen had had something up her sleeve, after all.

But it was not only the love of romance and adventure that kindled Lefty's mental fires. It was Tim, that imp and practical joker. His flashing black eyes were so loyal and truthful. Yes, it was Tim.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CREDIT TO THE TROOP

"Gosh, I never thought I could feel so tired and live," said Lefty, late that afternoon. "Honest, Mr. Corlett, my legs feel as if I'd been running from here to Mapletown."

Scoutmaster Corlett smiled. "Mapletown wouldn't mind a boy like you running in on them," he said. "You've been a credit to your troop today, Lefferts. You've saved a life, you've earned the lifelong gratitude of Farmer Bronson and you've as good as won the errant Tim over to scouting. His father said that you've convinced him for all time of the merits of scouting. I didn't tell him what was on my mind, though. It's really the merits of Lefferts that convinced him, eh?"

Lefty flushed with embarrassment and would have escaped from the scoutmaster's cabin had it not been for the deterrent hands of his comrades who had crowded in to congratulate him. They occupied every nook and corner of the

place in order to hear the thrilling experience of their brother scout.

Lefty occupied a position of prominence in the little one room log shack. He was stretched across the scoutmaster's cot and time and again had to force his eyelids back in order to keep them open.

"Boy, I couldn't imagine what had happened when I saw Lef come riding into camp in Mr. Bronson's car," Fenton said. "Maybe he'll give us a lot of vegetables for nothing now, huh?"

Everybody laughed.

"Vegetables, my eye," said Curt Dobbins. "He gave Lef a lot of vegetables for supper tonight, didn't he, Lef?"

Lefty smilingly admitted that such was the case. "They give you all you want to eat at that house, believe me," he said modestly. "You'd think I was the King of Siam or something, the way Mr. and Mrs. Bronson piled things on my plate. Goodnight, that's what makes me feel so sleepy."

"Well, I'm inclined to think that Mr. Bronson's stinginess is nothing but gossip," said the scoutmaster justly. "He almost thrust a

check upon me for Lefty until I assured him that it was against scout law to accept a reward for bravery and heroism."

"I didn't do it with any thought like that," said Lefty. "It's because I just did, that's all. And, anyhow, I've come to like Tim a lot. Gosh, I wouldn't take a reward for saving him no matter what, but boy, what I couldn't do with that hundred dollar check. That's the first time I ever saw a real check for a hundred dollars," he added naïvely.

"Well, a boy like you is bound to see a good many real hundred dollar checks if I'm any judge," said the scoutmaster encouragingly. "Don't start worrying about that now, Lefferts. You have plenty of time to think of money and all that it buys."

"Gosh, I don't worry, believe me," said Lefty. "I guess when I want anything like that I'll know how to get it. Just now I can't help thinking of the story Tim told me of how he stopped the nine-fifteen special one night by waving two of his father's lanterns. That kid has a regular mania for stopping the specials but I guess he won't do it any more."

"I guess not," said the scoutmaster. "He

looked very subdued sitting there in the car with his foot all bandaged up and he said that he was so lucky that it wasn't broken or that he wasn't killed that he was positively, absolutely going to keep away from mischief now and forevermore."

"How about keeping away from cameras?" asked Dillon Brown. "Did he say anything about keeping away from them?"

"No, and he doesn't need to," Lefty countered goodnaturedly. "Another thing, Dill, we all make mistakes that we're sorry for. Well, that's one mistake that Tim is sorry for. He's honest and truthful, that's what, and he's a feller that's just kind of easygoing and waits for you to tell him things without asking any questions. Why, before I knew it I was telling him a lot about myself, gosh, an awful lot."

It was out before Lefty had realized how it sounded. He knew instantly that Fenton had looked at him from the foot of the scoutmaster's cot and the old hurt expression was in his eyes. A moment after he had made some mumbled excuse and hurried out of the cabin.

It worried Lefty for a while and he resolved to explain his statement to Fenton at campfire.

He would tell him that he didn't say it to hurt anyone's feelings, much less an old friend like Fenton. He had said it merely to explain his liking for the impish Tim. He would certainly tell him. . . .

His eyes opened and closed until he didn't resist the drowsiness stealing over him any longer. He just lay there listening lazily to the hum of voices around him until they seemed far, far in the distance. Suddenly, after a blank interval, he heard the voice of his scoutmaster.

"We won't disturb him, boys," he was saying in a whisper. "We'll just let him lie there and have his nap out until after campfire's over. He's had a long, hard day."

There was a swishing of feet across the floor and then the thump of the closing door. The breeze blew in the wide windows and the shadows of dusk settled about the room.

And Lefty slept.

CHAPTER XXIV

FENTON

THAT was rather a fateful nap for Lefty but he was mercifully spared that knowledge for a few days to come. Certainly when he awoke, dazed and bewildered with the light of a full moon shining in upon him, it seemed something of a joke to him.

He sat up and looked around at the unfamiliar surroundings and chuckled. To have fallen asleep on his scoutmaster's bed was bad enough, but to have fallen asleep while his scoutmaster and his scout comrades were talking to him was extraordinary.

He got up yawning and smoothed out the depression he had made on the neatly covered bed and stumbled sleepily out of the cabin. Campfire had no lure for him that night. He lingered but a moment in passing across the camp to listen to the singing voices, then groped on to his cabin and so to bed.

It was not until after breakfast the next morn-

ing that the talk got around. In the Wolves' cabin they were making beds and tidying up in general when Dillon Brown came running in bearing the news.

"Well," said he, greatly excited. "This is one fine camp we're in, I can tell you. Gee whiz, nothing seems to be safe any more. We'll have to carry our luggage around whenever we leave the cabin if we don't want it taken. From what I just heard the only thing that's safe is the clothes we walk around in."

"How about bathing suits?" Larry asked laughing. "Are they safe?"

"It isn't any laughing matter," Dillon returned, in that aggrieved tone which he so often affected.

"Well, what's on your mind, then?" asked Lefty, giving his pillow a vigorous shake.

Dillon turned around and forced a smile to his lips. "Oh," said he mockingly, "does our hero want to know?"

"Not as badly as that," Lefty returned smiling. "Don't turn it over on me, though, Dill. You started the ball, now keep it rolling."

"Gee, get that," said Dillon to Fenton. "Just as if he isn't as anxious as the rest of you."

"What of it?" Fenton countered testily. "Sure he's anxious; we're all anxious. Now cut out the by-play and tell us the sad, sad story."

"Well," said Dillon in long drawnout tones, "there's a thief in this camp, that's what."

"Maybe the crows have got sick of the camera and are closing in on Columbia, huh?" asked Larry whimsically. "They say they're the worst kind of thieves."

"Who said anything about crows," said Dillon. "Anyway, talking about Columbia—that's who I heard this from. I was in there just before getting my lunch from him so I could go up the trail."

"Again?" Curt asked. "Goodnight, you didn't come to spend the whole summer at Donellen; you came to spend it with the crows up on East Trail. You ought to send postcards home saying, 'am having a lovely time on the trail with crows to the right of me and crows to the left of me.' "

"And out of the whole bunch he won't get one decent picture," said Larry whimsically. "I bet a dollar to a great big doughnut that Lefty gets a winner and he's only had two trys at the game."

"Do you think I care?" Dillon countered. "Anyway, I like to go up there and get away from this howling mob."

"Sure, the crows sing him to sleep," laughed Curt.

"Do you want to hear this or don't you?" Dillon demanded peevishly.

"Sure, start right in from the end," said Larry.

"Go ahead, Dill," said Fenton impatiently. "Can't you stand a little kidding? I notice you can hand out plenty of it when you want to. Now what it is—for the skeenteenth time, what is it?"

"We're all going to be called on the carpet sometime today," said Dillon sullenly. "Columbia got wind of it and he said he heard that someone walked off with something from one of these cabins last night."

"One of the counsellors?" asked Lefty, interested.

"How do I know!" said Dillon. "It's lucky Columbia told me that much. I promised him I wouldn't say anything about it. . . ."

"And that's why you came straight up here and told us, eh Dill?" Larry said, with a wink at

Lefty. "A scout is as good as his word—yes, he isn't. Boy, you remind me of eight thousand kilocycles, only your reception is much better. You missed your vocation, believe me. You could broadcast without any broadcasting station. Tell Dill and you tell the world—that ought to be your slogan."

"Oh, shut up," said Dillon angrily. "Who's broadcasting—who isn't as good as his word, huh? You're just trying to sound smart and funny, but it doesn't go. Anyway, how do you know that I promised Columbia on my word, huh? You're so smart, *I didn't!* I just promised him I wouldn't let it get around."

"The lake?" queried Larry tantalizingly.

"No, the camp," Dillon hissed back. "It shows how much I trust the fellers in my patrol that I come and tell you, doesn't it?"

"Sure, the pleasure's all yours," laughed Curt.

"You're all so smart," said Dillon, hurrying toward the door, "you'll know it when I come and tell you anything again—*all of you!* Anyway, you'll find it out this afternoon. There's a bulletin on the board down in front of Administration Shack and it says that we all have to as-

semble there right after lunch, rain or shine, trail or no trail. So there."

"It says that, does it?" Larry called after him as he stepped outside. "Do you think the crows can spare you this afternoon, Dill?"

Dillon failed to respond to that retort and hurried along on his own pursuits. Larry turned to the rest of the Wolves and laughed.

"A feller can sure get his goat, all right, huh?" he said. "Gee, I get a big kick out of him, all right. He falls for it all, hook, line and bait. Some snap, huh?"

"Too much snap sometimes, if you ask me," said Curt. "He gets on my nerves even if I do laugh it off. I don't like that flying off the handle and always getting sore. He *is* an old wash-woman and he *can't* keep the weather to himself and he knows it. He ought to be a good enough sport to admit it."

"Aw, I don't know," said Lefty good-naturedly. "I don't think he knows that he sounds so snappy sometimes. If he did, he wouldn't do it. That's what I think. Anyhow, Dill isn't so bad if he's handled right. He can't stand kidding, but then neither can a whole lot

of other fellers. Take him as you find him, that's my way."

"That's pretty good from you, Lef," said Larry, in a gentle, chiding tone. "He wouldn't pin any roses on you in a pinch."

Lefty shrugged his broad, lean shoulders and smiled. "Well, that's his hard luck, Larry," he said. "Not mine."

When he had completed the making of his cot a few seconds later, he looked up to find Fenton standing by and smiling.

"Gee, Lef," he said warmly, "do you ever get sore at *anybody?*"

Lefty grinned handsomely. "Sure, I suppose I do, Fen," he answered. "The trouble is I never realize it until after it's too late to do anything about it."

Fenton laughed. "That sounds like you," said he. "Anyway, will you get sore at me if I ask you something?"

"Nope," Lefty grinned. "Shoot away."

"All right," said Fenton hesitating a moment. Then: "Do you want to tell me why you passed me up in New York that day—the day we came here?"

Lefty shook his head deprecatingly. "Why,

there's nothing to tell, Fen," he said, looking his friend squarely in the eyes. "I didn't pass you up; *honestly!*"

Fenton turned away, disappointed. "You're the limit, Lef. On the level, you are. I ask you a question and you give me a riddle to answer. What is it you're holding out?"

"Absolutely, positively—nothing," Lefty laughed.

"Yes, you are, Lef," Fenton persisted. "You know you are."

"All right," said Lefty. "Then I am. Now is there anything else?" He chuckled exasperatingly.

Fenton went to the door. "Now I know what makes the wild man wild," he said with a hint of despair in his tones. "I guess you'll always be a mystery, Lef."

The eyes of the Wolves were now focused on Lefty with amusement for they enjoyed these friendly arguments between him and Fenton.

Larry paused in his bed-making. "Do you deny that, Lef?" he asked quizzically. "Do you deny you're what makes a wild man wild and do you deny you're a mystery? Answer me at once and if not, altogether!"

Lefty chuckled. "Nope, I don't deny anything," he said airily. "For one thing, I sometimes make myself wild, and for another thing, I can't understand myself so that makes me a mystery, doesn't it?"

"*Goodnight!*" Fenton exclaimed hopelessly.

"The same to you," said Lefty grinning.

With slow deliberation he took his muddy garments of the previous day out of the locker and strolled outdoors to clean them.

CHAPTER XXV

GUILTY?

"And there's just this I want to tell you, boys," Counsellor Rawlins was saying. "It distresses me very much." He coughed hoarsely.

The scouts of Donellen Camp grouped in front of Administration Shack shifted from one foot to the other. Something was coming. Something was in the very air they breathed. Even Dillon Brown kept quiet, taking the time, however, to steal a glance at his patrol leader, Larry Horton, and smile knowingly.

Larry winked back mischievously and murmured through closed lips, "You're it!"

Whereat Dillon looked the other way.

"Last night," boomed the counsellor's hoarse voice, "a singular thing happened. In one of our scoutmasters' cabins there were a group of boys gathered about for a friendly chat. It was just before campfire."

The boys stirred uneasily and peered into one another's faces, questioningly. No one spoke.

"After campfire," continued the counsellor, "the scoutmaster in question (or it would be better to say the scoutmaster who questions), retired to his cabin and found that something of considerable value was missing. For a very good reason he has asked me to withhold both his name and the stolen article or articles in question. Now. . . ."

There was another tense pause in which the Wolves of the First Mapletown Troop did considerable thinking. They nudged one another and Larry Horton went so far as to press his heel down on the toe of Dillon's shoe.

"This fine scoutish scoutmaster," the counsellor went on, "believes in the Golden Rule evidently. He has faith in his boys and he wants them to have faith in him also. He is sure that whoever did him any wrong by stealing will repent of it very soon and he has asked me to tell you all that his cabin door will be open night and day to the boy who is guilty. No questions will be asked; the wrong can be made right by the return of the article or articles. If the guilty boy wishes to do this unobserved he may do so tonight under cover of darkness at which time the scoutmaster will purposely ab-

sent himself. What a chance for that impulsive boy—what a chance for him perhaps to change the whole course of his life! Grasp this opportunity, my dear boy, whoever you are."

And so they were dismissed. They strolled about in groups, some toward the lake and some to their cabins. All wandered aimlessly for, at best, the day was broken.

The Wolves sought their cabin like chickens going to roost. Some of them suddenly remembered that they had brought books to camp to be read. Others sprawled on their cots and some paced the floor thoughtfully. Dillon Brown was one of the latter.

"Well," he said after a sharp intake of breath. "Didn't I tell you so?"

Curt looked up from the book he was holding and laughed shrilly. "It would have to be you to say that, Dill," he said. "Couldn't you think of anything better than that?"

"Well, it's serious, isn't it?" Dillon retorted. "It's among *us,* among us *Wolves.* Rawlins didn't have to mention any names or say much more for me to guess that."

"Keep quiet, Dill," said Fenton quietly. "You won't make things any better talking

about it. Every feller here knows his own business without you telling them."

"Yes, I know, but it doesn't make me feel very good to be in a patrol where there's a . . ." Dillon began.

"Well, then, get out!" Curt said testily.

Dillon scowled, went over to his cot and sat down.

There was an ominous silence. Suddenly Larry looked up from his book. "Say," he said, "why should we have to take the buck when there's a dozen other scoutmasters here, huh?"

"That's just what I was thinking of," said Lefty. "Maybe we weren't the only ones visiting last night."

"Yes, and maybe you weren't the only one that fell asleep on a scoutmaster's cot," said Dillon sharply.

The atmosphere was charged for a moment.

Larry dragged his long, lanky body out of the chair. "Now see here, Dill," he said threateningly. "Another one like that and you can take it up with Corlett. I won't be responsible. There wasn't any need of that."

"Don't, Larry," said Lefty smiling. "I can understand Dill saying that because he's Dill.

But there's this much to say for that remark—it would sort of pass the buck to me the way I fell asleep there. Nobody would really believe me if I told them that I woke up and came straight away from there and right up here. I admit it looks phoney."

"Nothing of the kind," said Fenton. "We were all in there so why should it pass to you just because you fell asleep and were the last one out. We all had an equal chance to do the dishonest thing if we wanted to, didn't we?"

"Yes, but there's safety in numbers," Dillon spoke up. "You can't deny that."

"And so we hear from Grandma again," Curt said sarcastically. "What would you suggest, Mr. Sherlock, huh?"

"That you keep quiet," Dillon retorted.

"You don't get anywhere that way," said Lefty, calmly. "Why not wait until tonight and see what happens? Gosh, even if there was a guilty feller among us, he'd have a heck of a chance to make good with you fellers sitting around and talking a lot of nothing. I know I'm going down to the lake and swim and think of everything else but whether or not the other feller's guilty."

CHAPTER XXVI

EAVESDROPPING

LEFTY would have given much to avoid hearing it. Indeed, for a few minutes they were not aware that he had been standing in the doorway. It was the usual suppertime rush—getting out of bathing things and jumping into their khaki. Apparently they had forgotten that he might be coming along and joining the rush also.

Of course, it was Dillon. He was standing before Larry gesticulating wildly and at the same time trying to arrange his scout scarf in the latest mode. A very difficult feat, indeed.

"Don't you remember that he said what he could do with a hundred dollar check, huh?" Dillon asked excitedly. "And don't you remember how he said he could get anything like that if he wanted to 'cause he knew how? Do you deny he didn't say it?"

"No, I don't deny it," said Larry. "But what does that prove?"

"That two and two don't make four unless

you have two and two," said Curt. "In other words, Dill would like to accuse me of murder just because I say I'd like to choke him."

"All right," said Dillon, giving his scarf a final pat. "You fellers can sneer and laugh and make all the smart-aleck remarks you want, but let me tell you—*he's* too easygoing and too smiling all the time to be what you think he is. I've been getting his number a long time now and I bet I'm right! What about that day in New York—could you name anything more phoney than that, huh?"

"Corlett knows, that's enough," Curt roared across the room.

"Hmph, that's funny too," Dillon remarked. "Anyway, if you don't think it's him, who is it?"

"You, maybe," Curt retorted.

"That just as sensible as saying it could be Larry or Fen or. . . ."

"There's a lot in that, too, Dill," said Lefty and his blue eyes sparkled quizzically. "You can never tell about anybody these days, huh? Don't trust your best friend and all that stuff. The only thing, that kind of stuff gets you all lopsided and miserable. *That's* why I'm so

easygoing and smiling and not miserable. I trust everybody, I guess. No favorites and I don't talk unless I can do somebody some good."

He walked in the cabin leisurely, removed his bathing togs and dressed carefully. He even whistled, to everybody's amazement. And when he had finished the supper gong was just striking. He looked about his cot to see if he had forgotten anything, then strolled to the door.

Dillon had long vanished into the eats shack and Fenton also was out of sight. Larry and Curt strolled down the hill with Lefty.

"Don't think twice about what that nut Dill said," Curt began apologetically. "He. . . ."

"Ought to be a detective," Lefty interposed with a laugh. "He's always on the wrong trail, poor Dill is. I think he'll be pretty disappointed if he doesn't pin something on me."

"Well, we'll give him a rose," Larry said whimsically.

"Atta boy, Larry," Lefty applauded. "Let's talk about roses."

"*Let's!*" they cried unanimously.

CHAPTER XXVII

WITH THE STORM

It bade fair to be an uncomfortable meal time for one and all. Scouts who heretofore had had the most implicit faith in their patrol comrades, now looked askance at one another. A question asked was an answer to be feared. Those who had the temerity to voice their opinions aloud were soon hushed with black looks and warning fingers.

As a supper it was a failure. Columbia declared this startling fact to Lefty later and brought forth dish after dish of untouched pudding as proof positive. It did not go to waste, however, as the night's events sent a score of scouts to the chef's door, hungry and weary.

Word came after the entire camp was long tucked in for the night. Counsellor Rawlins received the message over the phone and notified each scoutmaster so that in the course of events, Scoutmaster Corlett came knocking at the stout door of the Wolves' Cabin.

Before the boys had time to gather their wits together, he switched on the light in an effort to rouse them.

"Gosh," said Lefty, "is anything the matter?"

"I should say so," answered the scoutmaster. "There's a terrible storm blowing this way and it has blown the big airplane, *City of New York* down somewhere in the mountains. They think it must be around here and Counsellor Rawlins just received word from the Super-Coastways people that the liner was losing her bearings because of the wind and rain and was making an appeal for help. Now, it's up to every scout to see what aid we can render. Put on your raincoats and boots and take your flashlights. Be prepared! Go in groups or singly—go as you like, but the more scattered you are the better chance there is of one finding it. And that one is to get in touch with the others if he can and have the word brought straight back."

He hurried out of the cabin, his oilskins flapping noisily. There was pandemonium in the camp. The rush of many feet, inquiring voices, commanding voices and then the howling sweep

of the storm as it rushed down from the mountains.

The Wolves dressed hurriedly, talking little, but thinking a great deal. Each scout believed himself destined to be the one who would first get to the rescue of the ill-fated airship. Each scout wondered who it was that had lived and who it was that had already died. All of them knew from the scoutmaster's anxiety that the noted liner had already met with disaster.

They were out of their cabin and defying the storm in five minutes. Flashlights gleamed in the rain swept darkness like a myriad of fireflies. Not one found himself in familiar company and Lefty found himself without any. In the rush and confusion he lost track of Fenton and Larry whom he had determined to track with. Now he was alone, free lancing, he called it.

He squared his shoulders and found himself taking the familiar West Trail. Once, before the woods enveloped him, he heard the cry of a wolf, a brother wolf, Billy Rhodes. He couldn't mistake Billy's high pitched voice. It was recognizable even at that great distance and he judged that his brother scout must be going up the

East Trail with the rest for the echo had drifted from that direction.

He turned his coat collar high up around his neck and let his light flash along the trail before him. The echo of voices reached him now and then only to die in the howling of the wind and the rain. In the middle of Bronson's woods he saw an owl sitting complacently on the edge of a limb and just for fun he turned the light full in its queer, blinking eyes. The bird did not move, however, and Lefty, mindful of the missing liner, did not tarry.

Most of the searchers had taken the East Trail and the short cut to the West Trail, but Lefty felt certain that he could make a more thorough search by taking the longer route. And, to be sure, his scouting instinct had lured him up this longer and lonelier trail. The storm was coming from the east and it was safe to assume that the airship had been forced along before it.

He had it all planned out in detail for his experience of yesterday gave him knowledge today. And Tim had given him many valuable hints about the neighboring mountains. Tuttle's Tower was as good an objective in the

present situation as he knew of. It had many favorable aspects, being easy to reach as it lay just below the center of the storm. The trail to the branch line tracks and up over the mountain on the farther side was his best bet and he felt a lucky one, if there could be luck in the face of such a disaster.

It was a strange mission and the storm did not help the searchers any. Now and then lightning flashed across the distant sky and it brought to Lefty's mind the moments of horror he had spent in the well.

"Well," he said aloud with a quizzical smile, "all's well that ends well.—Gosh, that's a joke."

In the wake of a crash of thunder he heard sounds and when he stopped to listen a shadow moved out into the area of his light.

"Hullo!" he called. "Who's there?"

"Me, and ain't this luck, huh?" came Tim's voice.

"Well, you little rascal," Lefty answered delightedly. "What are you doing out this time of night? You ought to be in the house with that game foot."

"Nothin' doin', Lef," said Tim coming up to him. "I heard you guys were all out fer that

there airship an' I got a hunch that mebbe you'd come up here to head them off, bein's I told you 'bout it yesterday."

"Well, you guessed right," said Lefty. "And if you feel you can stand it, gosh, it'll be great to have you come along. The first feller that can find them'll get a lot of credit. I could tell the way Mr. Corlett spoke. The whole camp is out. Your father know you're here, Tim?"

"Sure," said Tim. "Pop's been great since yesterday—not so cranky like he usually is. Guess he was glad I wuzn't killed. Anyhow, everybody in the mountains is up and huntin', I guess." He took Lefty's arm and limped along with him.

"Doesn't hurt you much, does it?" Lefty asked with concern.

"Nah, only when I put my weight down on it," Tim answered. He pinched the bridge of his nose as they hurried along—it was a nervous little habit that he had, and one which amused Lefty greatly.

"Look out, you'll pinch it off," said Lefty. "What's the idea?"

"Aw, I wuz thinkin'—I s'pose I always do that when I'm thinkin'," said Tim. "We'll go

straight to Tuttle's Tower—see!" He added thoughtfully.

"That's just how I figured it, Tim," Lefty admitted modestly. "I kind of thought how it was just in the direction where it would get the worst of this."

"Say," said Tim admiringly, "you'd think you were born right around these here mountains or something, the way you figure out these things. Some of those guys who've been coming up to that camp for a couple of years don't know that much. For instance, that Brown guy that comes up to the East Trail for crows' pitchers—gee, he makes me good and sick! I could biff him when he makes out he knows everything."

Lefty laughed. "Poor Dill," he said, more to himself than to Tim, "he gets in wrong with everybody."

"*Poor nothin'!*" said Tim disgustedly. "He just likes to hear himself talk about himself, that's all. A couple of days that I took that trail when I was doing chores for Pop, I met him. And he wuz knockin' you like sixty—even I didn't know who you wuz. It didn't come to me 'til you told me your name afterwards. Gee, I'd like to play a good joke on him."

"Remember what you promised your father," Lefty warned him, laughing.

"I promised not to play jokes on trains and engineers," Tim protested. "I didn't promise nothin' about crabby, gabby guys like that Brown. He'd get good and sore at a joke played on him, I bet. There's no fun playin' jokes on you—you don't even bawl me out afterward. Instead you almost get yourself run down by the special just to save a mean bird like me." There was a ring of real feeling in his voice.

"Forget it," said Lefty. "Gosh, I couldn't see you killed without helping you all I could. Maybe I was kind of mad at you at first, only I got over it when I knew you didn't mean that I should get hurt."

"I don't think you can get mad no matter what you say," Tim persisted. "That's why there ain't any fun gettin' hunk on you. You just smile and save my life—gee whiz! Now with that Brown guy it'll be different. . . ."

"What are you going to do to him?" Lefty asked laughing.

"Well, I wuz thinkin' how Pop has a stuffed crow in one o' them glass cases," Tim said, thoughtfully pinching at his nose again. "It

stands right in our parlor and it's stood there since my grandpop was alive—that's who it really belonged to. It wuz a tame one that had hurt it's leg and my grandpop found it in the field one day and took it home and fixed it. The crow stayed with him till it died and that's why he had it stuffed. Now I wuz thinkin' I'd git it out o' that glass case. . . ."

"And if you do, your father'll give you the dickens—maybe worse than that," Lefty chuckled.

"Nah, he won't know it, 'cause nobody goes in our parlor much," said Tim confidently. "I'll have it back there in a jiffy. All I want is to play a good joke on that high and mighty Brown."

"What kind of a joke?" asked Lefty curiously.

"I'll tell you better after I get that bird out from under the glass," Tim said mischievously.

They talked little on their way through the woods. The gaunt trees, rocking to and fro under the impetus of the wind, and the slashing rain swept unceasingly in their faces for they were now walking right into the teeth of the storm. Just as they reached the branch line a

young deer leaped out of the bushes and disappeared into the shadows of the roadbed before they could speak.

"Gosh, I wish I could run like that," said Lefty. "They say a deer can beat a car sometimes."

"Yeh, but you ain't got any kick," said Tim. "You wuz back from Tuttle's Tower yesterday before that train got out o' sight o' the bend. Honest, it seemed that way to me."

"Well, I did kind of hurry on my way back yesterday," Lefty admitted. "I didn't know how bad your foot might be. Anyway, I can seem to get over the ground pretty fast. Gosh, it's all I *can* do."

"Like fun," Tim protested. "I bet there's lots of things you can do that you don't brag about like that Brown guy." Then: "Listen Lef," he said hesitatingly, "he told me something about you that day. That wuz when I didn't know how you took everything so easy going like. If I did I'd have biffed him for sayin' what he did about you. Uh—want to hear it?"

"Well," said Lefty, embarrassed. "Will it do me any good, Tim? I mean, what good does

it do? Dill probably said it because he was kind of sore at me and fellers don't mean things they say that way."

"What's he got to be sore at you about, huh?" asked Tim indignantly. "What did you do to him, huh?"

"Dill's just that way, Tim," answered Lefty good-naturedly. "You don't have to do anything to him exactly. If you don't tell him all your business—why you do this and that and so forth, why, he gets huffy. I just don't pay any attention to him. He's been a little peeved about the crow business, too, but he hasn't any cause to be—gosh, how do I know yet whether I've had luck with those pictures or not? It might have been a robin or a sparrow or a frog that hopped down and snapped that shutter."

"Anyhow, he ain't only sore at you for that, Lef," said Tim, earnestly. "He's got it in that big head of his that you're not—not *honest*, sort of. That's how he hinted it to me. He tol' me a long story how you disappeared in New York the day you wuz comin' to camp. He says you ran so fast they couldn't find you an' there wuz some mystery 'bout it 'cause you wouldn't tell any of the fellers why.—Besides—besides he

says your brother ran away because he wuz a *—thief!*"

A wealth of color mounted Lefty's cheeks and his arm tightened against Tim's as they crossed between the branch line tracks.

"*Did—did he say that?*" he asked amazed.

"Honest, he did, Lef," answered Tim. "I didn't tattle it to you because I wanted to sound like a girl, but he's too gabby to suit me when he gets goin'. If I'd known you wuz the kind of guy you are I'd have biffed him for that—honest. Gee. . . ."

"Was he alone when he told you that?" Lefty asked, quietly. He had Fenton in mind—those first few days when Fenton had been accompanying Dillon up the trail.

"Yuh," said Tim, "he wuz sittin' there all alone with the camera between his knees an' the reason I stopped wuz because he looked kind o' lonely. But gee, a guy like him *ought* to be lonesome—I know that now. He gabs and gabs and gabs."

"That's what I tried to tell you, Tim," said Lefty, striving hard to keep a tremor out of his voice. "Dill just has to talk, and I suppose before he knows it, he's talking too much. He

can't help it, I guess. That's the way he is."

"Say, listen," said Tim indignantly, "don't even that make you mad? Gee, I'd be mad as . . . even I *am* mad. I'm mad for your sake—gee!"

Faithful, loyal Tim. He did not know it, but Lefty was nearer to anger and dismay than he had ever been in his life.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE SEARCH

Lefty said nothing more until they had passed beyond Tuttle's Tower. They struck into the heart of the mountains at that point, taking a wild and almost trackless route so that they were forced to go single file.

"You wouldn't think I was a coward, would you, Tim?" Lefty asked suddenly.

"*You!*" Tim returned with obvious amazement. "I should say not. Gee whiz, how could I think that after yesterday, huh?"

"Well, that's one kind of bravery, and standing for what Dillon says about my brother is another thing," said Lefty, glad that the darkness hid his features.

Tim, with the flashlight, was leading the way. "I know," he said. "It's that scout business, huh? You're not s'posed to biff a guy like Brown after you get in the scouts, are you? That's what I read once anyhow."

"They think a scout should be resourceful

enough to settle any argument without coming to blows," said Lefty, unable to restrain the chuckle that came to his lips. "I'll admit that there are lots of fellers who need sense pounded into them. It seems the only way sometimes, but on the whole I agree with scouting. You can do an awful lot by talking things over and getting the other feller's point. But with Dillon, it's different. I'll admit that talking doesn't do much good—he's kind of stubborn. Still, I think I could do lots with him if I had a clear conscience about this business. Now, I've said it, Tim."

"Said what?" Tim asked puzzled. He stopped a moment.

"I sort of let things out," Lefty answered. "I've got reasons for not biffing Dill. Even if I was the biffing kind, I wouldn't biff him because maybe what he said is partly true. I don't know exactly." Lefty's voice trembled slightly.

Tim walked on and Lefty followed. They were continually dodging tree stumps and climbing over rocks and their progress became slower and slower as they ascended. Deep in the woods on the next slope they heard the cry of some nocturnal animal, but its throaty echo was soon lost in the wild night.

"Why don't you ask me something, Tim?" Lefty queried after a time.

"Ask you what?" Tim returned without stopping.

"What I meant by what I said before," Lefty answered. "Did you hear what I said that time?"

"Yes."

"Why don't you ask me a question then?"

"It ain't any o' my business, Lef. If you wanted to talk about your brother you would." Tim stopped a moment and faced him. "Just the same, whether it's true or partly true, like you say, I'd like to biff that guy. My pop says I've got to join the scouts so I'd have to biff him before I joined, huh? Just say the word, Lef, and I'll do it."

Lefty laughed outright. "Gosh, Tim, you're aces up. I won't give you the word to biff anybody—not even Dill. But I've got to hand it to you for being such a good sport."

"Gee, it ain't bein' a good sport jest to mind my business," Tim protested. "The only time I ever forgot to mind my business was that day with the camera. Gee, I felt flat, all right. Pop would never buy me one, but now he's goin' to

—he'll buy me anything like that, he says, as long as I don't play jokes."

"Well, then, remember that when you're tempted to get the crow out of the glass case for Dill," Lefty laughed.

Tim laughed too and they struggled on up, up through the mud and reached the second slope weary and breathless. The wind was gradually dying down but the rain continued its sweeping progress down the mountainside. They stopped and rested on a big boulder.

Tim played the flashlight round about them, down over the tops of pine trees, then up the rocky face of the mountain. Suddenly the light rested on something white hanging from a near-by tree. Both boys started impulsively.

"What do you think it is, huh?" Tim asked, and kept the light on the tree.

"I'll go and look," Lefty answered. "It's not more than twenty feet. You sit and rest your foot, Tim. Keep the light on it. I can climb better without it."

He was off, scrambling up the rocky face of the precipice. He slipped and slid but triumphed. And when he called to Tim his voice was deep with excitement.

"It's a wing!" he cried. "A wing of a plane —ripped like the dickens. Part of it's on the ground and part in the tree. They must have fallen down on that slope, Tim. They were coming down—I can tell by the pieces that were ripped off. Wait, I'm coming!"

They talked it over, eagerly, excitedly, and agreed that, minus one wing, the airship must have fallen somewhere nearby. The question was how to find it in the pitch darkness of the slope. And, after all, the little flashlight illumined but a small area at a time. They might pass and re-pass the wreck without knowing it.

However, they stuck to Lefty's earlier theory that the best bet was to follow the wind. And though the range of the wind was great they took heart at the position of the wrecked wing and determined their hunt accordingly.

Dawn found their search still unrewarded. They were about two miles from the tree on which the wrecked wing hung and, as Lefty explained it, they felt as if they had circled the globe in that time.

They sat down on a wet, moss-covered rock and watched the eastern sky slowly brightening, the sun behind the night's clouds tinting it a

faint pink. The rain had ceased and the moving clouds gave the promise of a fair day. Tim sat pinching his nose.

Lefty grinned. "Now what, Tim?" he asked.

"I'm thinkin' mebbe now we'll be able to see what's what," Tim answered, smiling. "And most I wuz thinkin' how hungry I am."

"So am I," Lefty admitted. "We'll hunt for a few berries and it'll do us till we get back for breakfast. Then, what do you say we kind of shoot along toward the north, huh? Seems to me they couldn't have gone any farther without that wing. Funny we didn't bunk into any of our fellers or hear them somewhere, at least."

"Because they were follerin' trails, that's why," said Tim disgustedly. "There ain't one guy in that whole camp that's as good a scout as you, if you ask me. You ain't afraid of gittin' yer clothes torn or yer face scratched an' you make yer own trails 'cause yer got sense 'bout the wind. But you did yer share up here a'ready, Lef. Yuh look tired an' so do I feel tired so mebbe we better quit for a while, huh?"

"You ought to feel tired with that foot of yours, Tim, so you go on," Lefty suggested. "I'll just take one more look toward the north,

as I said. I don't feel so tired that I can't do that."

"Well, neither do I, then," said Tim. "Do you think I'll quit you? If you go, I'll go!"

And so they went together. Soon they were deep in the pine woods, peering from left to right in the trackless wilderness. There was a riot of chirping birds hailing the new day with sweet melody. A rabbit leaped out from some bushes and scurried away.

Lefty laughed.

Tim looked at him and shook his head. "You ain't even too tired to laugh. Gee, I thought I was used to mountains. Even if it wasn't for my foot I'd be tired."

"Well, just cheer up till we go a little way more, Tim," said Lefty brightly. "I'm tired too, but not discouraged. The only thing that would discourage me is a trail. From what you said before, a trail would be bad luck."

"Then I hope we strike a trail soon," said Tim laughing. "We could do it too if we just scooted out of these woods and go south."

The acrid smell floated toward them on the soft, morning breeze. Tim sniffed it wonderingly, Lefty sniffed it and was perplexed. It

was not of burnt pine—they could not distinguish it at all. But suddenly the air seemed full of it.

It is a section that has borne the brunt of many forest fires and tree growth is sparse. Therefore it was only a minute before they discovered the half-burned limbs of trees just beyond. And hurrying on they came upon the scene of the tragedy.

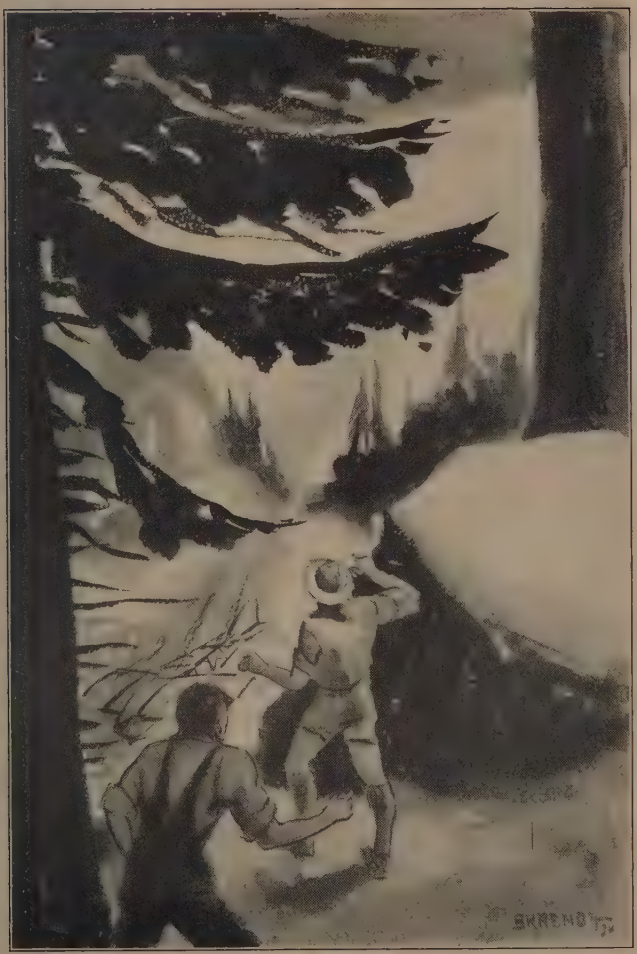
The charred remnants of the plane were scattered about the ground, fragments of clothing, and half of a man's shoe were first visible to the awed boys. Lefty found what seemed to be a charred bundle of something which he bent over to examine, then turned back in horror, holding up a silver ring before Tim's terrified eyes.

"A man's ring," he whispered, "that's all that's left."

"Nobody saved—*nobody?*" Tim whispered with a gulp.

Lefty shook his head. "They've burned before they got here. When they struck that tree. We can't do a thing now, Tim. Come on, we'll go south like you said."

They tiptoed out of the presence of death and did not speak until they were clear of the woods



THE CHARRED REMNANTS OF THE PLANE WERE SCATTERED ABOUT.

Lefty Leighton. *Page* 186

and into the sunlight. Lefty looked back just once to make sure of the wrecked plane's location. Then he linked arms with Tim.

"I got to hold onto something," he explained. "I feel kind of weak in my legs. Maybe I'm hungry, huh?"

"Yeah," said Tim in a quivering voice." I guess that's what's the matter with me, too."

CHAPTER XXIX

TRUE?

THEY had not yet found the promised trail but Tim seemed certain that they would soon reach it. And in vain did they look for the tree with the demolished wing.

"It's because we're farther west than we were last night," said Lefty. "Maybe not."

"If we are, we'll come out below the tower," said Tim, "and that'll suit me fine. The nearer home, the better."

They stopped now and again to pick berries and it was at one of these times that Tim scrambled through the bushes to gather some choice ones that were growing in the thicket. Lefty was busily engaged in another bush a few feet away trying to stay his own hunger. Suddenly Tim came toward him on tiptoe, his finger pressed to his lips, warningly.

"There's a guy asleep in the bushes, Lef," he whispered. "He's all scratched; his clothes are torn and he looks a mess. Come and see."

Lefty followed him quietly and when they reached the bushes he peered curiously at the still, sleeping figure. Suddenly his eyes widened and without a word, he pushed past Tim and went straight to the sleeping boy.

To Tim's amazement, he dropped to his knees and prodded the sleeper. "Ken!" he cried anxiously. "Ken!"

The sleeper moved his head a little but did not waken. Fear came into Lefty's eyes and he put his hand over the boy's heart. Something in the breast pocket obtruded and prevented him from listening for the desired heart beat. He slipped his fingers into the pocket and brought out the obstruction—a handsome watch with the initials C.C. engraved on its cover.

The color mounted in Lefty's cheeks and he slipped the watch in his raincoat pocket. Then he turned his attention once more to the sleeper, putting his head down at the boy's breast. Tim came over and stood by silently, waiting until Lefty looked up.

"All right?" he asked.

Lefty nodded and prodded the sleeper roughly.

"It's my brother, Tim; my brother Kenneth.

He's all right—he's just sleeping sound, that's all. He's always been that way. I'll wake him."

Tim nodded understandingly. "I'm that way too," he said, as if it were a usual thing to find runaway brothers in the mountains. "I never hear a sound once I'm sleeping."

Lefty smiled. "You're a brick, Tim," he said. "You don't know what this means to me—finding him like this. I—it kind of makes things worse. The question is, where did he come from?" He leaned over and shouted in his brother's ear.

It had the desired effect for Kenneth stirred immediately, then sat up, confused. His sleep-ridden eyes were fastened on Lefty for quite a time before he gave the least sign of recognition. Then his mischievous eyes sparkled.

"Yes, it's me, Ken," said Lefty. "How did you get here? Did you drop out of the sky or something like that?"

Kenneth leaned over and tapped his brother on the shoulder affectionately. "*Talk about luck!*" he said. "Is this near Donellen, Lef?"

"Sure, where did you think I'd be?" Lefty returned. "I asked you if you dropped here or something?"

"Sure, I did," Kenneth answered with unaffected nonchalance. "And I didn't know where I was dropping either. Believe me, I didn't know where I was going but I was on my way. Man alive, but I'm lucky! And to have dropped right here and have my own brother passing by. Boy, I look a mess, I guess. I got mixed up in a tree back a ways—somewhere up above. I couldn't tell you for the life of me now, it was so dark. I just crawled along, sort of, and when I found this dry thicket I naturally laid me down to sleep. Phew!"

Lefty rocked on his haunches. "No riddles, Ken," he said impatiently. "What are you talking about?"

"It isn't a riddle, Lef," Kenneth answered, and smiled at Tim. "I *did* drop here, or back there—it doesn't make any difference. I came down in a parachute. *And how!* Boy, I wonder how the rest of the gang made out? Nobody else in that plane was willing to take a chance but me."

"*What plane?*" Lefty asked in sheer amazement.

"*The City of New York*," answered Kenneth in rollicking tones. "I stowed away on it, but

they found me and they treated me decent. But when the storm came I was for beating it and believe me, they were worried too or they wouldn't have let me go. Man, I wonder how. . . ."

"We just came from up there," said Lefty in a toneless voice. "Ken, you're the luckiest bird alive! *The City of New York* is a heap of ashes on the second slope and the only thing that didn't burn was a man's silver ring." He brought it out of his pocket and held it up.

Kenneth's face was grave for a moment as he took the ring. "Man, man, that's awful," he murmured. "I—I didn't think it would be as bad as that. I—I thought they'd all make a jump after they saw me go. And you'd never guess, Lef, whose hand that ring was on—the hand that shook mine before I jumped."

Lefty found himself unable to speak and waited.

"Dillon Brown's father," Kenneth said. "Dill's father. That's why Chilton backed out of stowing away on it. He was afraid of Mr. Brown. Man, isn't that the limit?"

"Where's Chilton then, Ken?" Lefty asked, throatily. "Where is he?"

"Home, I guess," Kenneth answered, disgustedly. "He got me all keyed up to this airplane business and then when the big chance came he backed down all because Mr. Brown was in the cabin when we went to sneak in. I made it, though, and Mr. Brown was swell to me after they found out I was in there. Man, that's what makes me feel so bad—he was so nice to me."

Tim sat down in the thicket, alongside of the twin brothers, an interested spectator. "Mebbe that feller would o' gone west with the rest uv 'em if he'd o' gone, huh?" he ventured.

"Maybe is right, buddy," said Ken, as if he had known Tim all his life. "Chilton Cole is just the bird that wouldn't fly when the flying was good. You said it, he's lucky."

"I'm glad he's home, Ken, for your sake," said Lefty. "You shouldn't have taken him along on your wild adventures, anyhow. It's made bad friends with Fen and me."

"Like fun, I took him along," said Kenneth indignantly. "He took himself along and when I came across him in the train that night, he picked on me about going to that aviation field. Of course we had fun, going in to New York and

looking around places in between times. But I'd rather go to sea than be in an airplane any time. Still, I got quite a kick out of flying down in that storm without knowing where I was going."

"I would too," Tim agreed. "I'd like it fine, but not to burn up in these here mountains. No sir!"

"Well, we've got to get back to camp," said Lefty, worriedly. "No one else found that plane, I know that. They'll be anxious. Gosh, I'll hate telling poor Dill!"

Kenneth got up and brushed his clothes. Apparently he was unhurt by the night's experiences and except for the external scratches, which he ascribed to his encounter in the tree, he seemed in his usual spirits. He linked arms with Lefty and Tim and started down the mountain with them humming a popular tune.

Lefty was dismayed and perplexed, perhaps more than he had ever been in his life. He had many unpleasant duties to perform, many excuses to make and not the least of his troubles was the watch reposing in his raincoat pocket. He had said nothing to Kenneth about it; Tim's

presence made it impossible. There was nothing to do but right the wrong himself, and wrong it surely was for he had recognized the handsome watch as the property of the senior Cole, who had received it from the Mapletown Rotary Club in honor of his services. He remembered Fenton's telling him at the time that it was worth a great deal of money, being made of platinum and studded with diamonds.

Lefty winced inwardly at the thought. Kenneth was chatting gaily at his side, telling Tim of his desire to wash up somewhere and then make a bee-line for New York. He didn't want to go into Donellen—that would never do. He wanted to go to sea as quickly as possible.

"I think you better, Ken," Lefty agreed. "I feel awful about it, but unk wouldn't have you home. Maybe in a month or so he'll change his mind."

"I should worry when he changes his mind," said Ken. "I'd like to see aunt again, but unk won't give me any gray hairs. Me for the life on the ocean wave."

And that was how the twin brothers met and parted—a strange parting indeed, but one that

seemed necessary from Lefty's point of view. He took leave of them two hours later in Bronson's field giving Tim explicit instructions to see that Kenneth washed up somewhere and started on the right road to New York.

"He can come home along with me an' wash up an' we'll feed him up, too," Tim said. "An' —an' if he needs any—any money. . . ."

"Man alive, I don't need money," Kenneth protested laughingly. "I've got enough to take me to New York and to get me a job. Boy, I've been working and I've got more than I started out with."

"I'm glad of that," said Lefty, with evident relief. "Gosh, I'm glad of that!"

He watched until the trail took its downward course to the lake. Then gradually the curly brown head of his brother became lost to view and he wondered how long it would be before he saw it again. And Tim, too—would he ever climb the West Trail to see him again?

Lefty turned his back on the scene and walked wearily on toward camp. A mistiness clouded his vision, but he preferred to walk that way rather than see things as they really were. Somehow he wanted to walk in the past, in hap-

pier days. For he had to go back to Mapletown that very day and explain things. He had to go back and explain to Mr. Cole. How, he did not know.

But Dillon was right—Kenneth was a thief!

CHAPTER XXX

GOODBYE

FATE is so perverse. At least, she was so with Lefty on his memorable return to camp. The ones he wanted weren't there and the one he didn't want, was there. Scoutmaster Corlett and Dillon Brown, for instance. . . .

Scoutmaster Corlett had been in camp for breakfast and had started up the trail again with the other contingent of searchers. The counsellors, too, were all searching. All of the Wolves were absent except Dillon.

Dillon was the last one in the world that he wanted to be alone with. He couldn't tell Dillon of his father's death. Yet there was the boy standing outside of Administration Shack waiting for him to come out. Word had already spread through the almost empty camp that Lefty Leighton had found the wreck of the plane.

"And so I got to go right home," Lefty was saying to the scoutmaster temporarily in charge

of the Administration office. "It's on account of something important about my brother, you tell Mr. Corlett, huh? Don't tell anyone else. Mr. Corlett will know, kind of. Tell him I'll write to him and explain and say when I'm coming back. I've just got to pack and get the bus."

He raced down the steps only to be besieged with questions from Dillon who stuck to him all the way up the hill and into the cabin.

"How did you know where to look for it, huh?" asked Dillon. "How did you find it so easy—they said you found it at dawn, did you?"

Lefty nodded and slipped off his raincoat, throwing it across the bed preparatory to packing it. The watch slid out of the pocket and onto the floor but as he was over at his locker by that time, he did not notice it. Neither did he notice that Dillon immediately spied it and quite stealthily picked it up. After a cursory examination it reposed in the Brown coat pocket.

Dillon smiled with unholy glee, but held his tongue until he became aware of Lefty's packing activities.

"Where do you think you're going?" he asked curiously.

"Where all good scouts go," Lefty answered smiling. "Home!"

"*Home!*" Dillon repeated, amazed. "What's the idea?"

"If I told you, you'd know more than I do," Lefty returned enigmatically and kept his eyes on his packing. If he once looked at Dillon, he'd have to tell him about his father. But no, he had left word at the office for some one else to do that—Scoutmaster Corlett.

He piled his clothes in hurriedly and waited until he had dressed before he folded the raincoat carefully and laid it right on top. Then he closed the bag, blissfully ignorant that the troublesome watch was in Dillon's pocket.

That mischief-maker smiled and sighed. "You got a good reason for going home, huh?" he questioned slyly.

"A very good reason, Dill," Lefty answered gently.

"Are you coming back again?" Dillon persisted.

"That depends," Lefty answered. "Now, Dill—you—you're wanted at the office. I forgot to tell you before. I guess you better go right away."

Dillon got up and affected a yawn. "Suits me," he grinned and strolled toward the door. "I—I guess you want to get rid of me so you can be mysterious again or something, huh?"

"Nothing of the kind, Dill," said Lefty kindly. "I—hope I'm not the kind of a feller that would want to get rid of you now. It's that you're wanted at the office."

"Oh, all right," said Dillon, "but there's no hurry. A letter or something I suppose, or a check from my father. Well, that can wait, because I got something more important to talk about first. I see the fellers coming down the hill and I'll go and meet 'em."

Lefty protested but Dillon only grinned and hurried away.

He had just three minutes before he must go for the bus and he spent them in saying goodbye to Columbia. When he came out and stepped into the road, Larry and Curt and Billy Rhodes were passing on to the office. Dillon, of course, was with them.

The bus driver was impatient to start and had already set the car in gear. But it did not deter Lefty from calling a pleasant goodbye to his companions and patrol leader.

"See you soon, I hope," he called smilingly. "Corlett will tell you why. I haven't a minute. "*Bye!*"

The next minute he was thrown into his seat, baggage and all. But he did not mind that; it is doubtful if he was aware of it for the turmoil of his mind obliterated any physical discomfort that he might have felt.

His scout hat was all awry on his head and his scarf was twisted half way around his neck, but he did not care. All he could think of was the strange expression on their faces—Larry and Curt and Billy. Dillon was smiling strangely too. But Fenton wasn't there—he was glad Fenton wasn't there to look at him so strangely.

"And they didn't say a word," he mumbled up against the window-pane. "They didn't even say goodbye. Just stood there and looked at me as if I was poison."

He closed his eyes to shut out the memory of it and tried to think of Tim. There was a scout for you—*Tim!*

CHAPTER XXXI

EXPLANATION

"I WROTE to Fenton as soon as I got home and explained the whole thing," said Chilton Cole, sitting on the Hulbert's porch rail swinging his long legs. "I told him how that watch wasn't stolen by anybody, not even *me!* Goodnight, poor Ken had nothing to do with it. He didn't even know I was beating it away that night. We just happened to meet on the train—just a...."

"Coincidence," Mrs. Hulbert interposed sweetly. "See there, Lefferts? I knew it was that and nothing else. I only wish your uncle was home to hear all this."

"It wouldn't do any good, aunt," said Lefty smiling at her. "Unk won't come out of his shell until Ken gets rid of the wander bug and gets down on his knees and asks forgiveness. And Ken won't do that. We'll just have to count Ken out for a while, I guess."

"Poor Kenneth," said Mrs. Hulbert. She moved closer to Lefty on the porch swing and

put her arm around him. "Now go on, Chilton —we've interrupted you again."

"Aw, that's all right," Chilton said good-naturedly. "I had a lot to talk over with mom and pop too—gee, I'll keep close to home for a while you can bet. But I had to come right over when I heard what Lef came home for last night. Gee, pop wouldn't stand for Ken being accused of taking his watch, no sir! I just gave it to Ken to keep for me when we got ready to slip into that plane. I was going to send it home a dozen times, but just put it off."

"Then how did you come to take it?" Lefty asked curiously.

"An accident," Chilton said in his loud, blustering way. "I knew pop and mom were in the city that night and I just got the bug that it would be a good time to beat it and see what aviation was like. So I rushed downstairs and into pop's room to see what time it was. I wanted to catch that eleven-eleven train. Well, the clock on the dresser wasn't going so I fished in the jewelry case and found the watch, when all of a sudden I heard the maid moving around and coming down from the top floor."

"You kind of lost your head, huh?"

"*And how!*" exclaimed Chilton. "You know how it is when you're doing something you shouldn't do. You kind of go off the track. Well, I did, believe me. I just naturally dropped the watch in my pocket and beat it down the stairs and I didn't stop running until I got to the station. I never even knew I had the watch till I got to New York."

Lefty smiled contentedly. "Well, it's worked out all right, kind of. Anyhow, I said I knew my own brother—I knew he wasn't a thief, no matter what!"

"Yeh, it's worked out all right," Chilton said happily. "Dill's the only one who'll be hit hard. He got home early this morning. And do you know what Mrs. Brown told my mother? She said that they haven't a cent—*not a cent!* She said Dill's father lost everything he had in stocks or something and that he had gone in that plane to go to Chicago and try and start all over again. Even the people he was going to work for paid his way in that plane."

"Well, that's too awful," said Mrs. Hulbert sincerely. "Don't they own their house?"

"Nope," answered Chilton. "Not a stick in it, my mom says. Poor Dill will have to go to

work and go to night school, but they have to have something to live on and pop says we'll have to take up a collection in the neighborhood or something. Gee whiz, Mrs. Brown is awful thin and mom says she's not any too strong."

"Hmph," said Lefty thoughtfully. "Poor Dill. I'll have to go up there today. Maybe I could help him, huh?"

"I don't doubt it," said Mrs. Hulbert understandingly. "You manage to help others, Lefferts, so why not Dillon?"

"Why not!" Lefty repeated.

CHAPTER XXXII

LEFTY IS LEFTY

"And what did Scoutmaster Corlett have to say in his letter?" Mrs. Hulbert asked Lefty the next morning.

"About the same as Chilton told us," answered Lefty. "He said that his wallet was what had been missing but that he found it. Dill thought the watch belonged to him because the initials on it were C.C. just like Mr. Corlett's. He said Fenton wanted him to be sure and remember him to me."

"Did Dillon have anything to say about it when you saw him last night?" Mrs. Hulbert inquired anxiously.

"Sure, the poor bird was so glad to see me, he fell all over my neck," said Lefty. "He apologized a dozen times, I bet. Said he never meant to judge me wrong and all that, but that the watch looked pretty evident of my guilt."

"Hmph," said Mrs. Hulbert. "Still, he hadn't any right to jump to conclusions in that man-

ner. You had some rights, I should think. The manly thing would be for him to have asked you."

"Well, I know," Lefty said good-naturedly, "but Dill isn't the kind to stop and think. He just does and says. Anyhow, he's got an awful lot of good traits—he's darn nice to his mother and that's a whole lot. She needs it now, I bet. I'm glad now that I never went off the handle about Dill, do you know that?"

"Yes, dear," smiled Mrs. Hulbert. "I know that and I know you're too forgiving sometimes. Father or no father, Dillon hasn't been as good a brother scout as he should have been. Let's hope when he gets along in the world that he'll remember what a friend you've been to him when he needed it."

"Gosh—*friend?*" Lefty asked amusedly. "What I've done isn't anything. Boy, it's just kind of a good turn and that's the least I can do as a scout, isn't it?"

"Didn't you write and tell Mr. Corlett that you wished him to turn over that twenty-five dollar Aiken Award to the Brown fund?" Mrs. Hulbert asked in a gentle, chiding tone.

"Oh, that was hardly twenty-five dollars earned," answered Lefty. "I got the pictures of those crows without any trouble at all. And poor Dill, when I come to think of it—working all last summer and part of this, and he didn't get one! And *me*—here Corlett tells me I got two beauts out of the two films and without winking an eyelash hardly. Dill deserves it more than I do—he sure does."

Mrs. Hulbert smiled. "And what about writing and telling Mr. Corlett that you also wish the remainder of your board at the camp—four weeks more, isn't it—to be turned over to the Brown fund? You did that for Dillon, too, didn't you? As a friend? You are giving up four weeks of recreation that you need, and to say nothing of the hard-earned money that was to pay for that recreation. You're turning it right over to the Browns. And you'll spend the rest of the summer in this hot town, taking your uncle's bad moods and gruff commands with your usual smile."

"Oh, well, aunt. . . ." Lefty began.

"It is not *well*, Lefferts dear," said the good woman. "I hate to think of you cleaning out the cellar and mowing the lawn for the next four

weeks when you could just as well be breathing in great deep breaths of pure mountain air."

"Anyway, it rains a lot up at Donellen," said Lefty, groping for a suitable defense.

"I'm not scolding you for your charity, dear," Mrs. Hulbert said with a smile. "I think it's fine and I'll help Mrs. Brown too, if I can. What I most wanted to chide you about is your generosity—you're even too generous."

Lefty smiled, but looked uncomfortable. Then: "Say aunt," he said hesitantly, "Did I tell you that Dill's got a job at the Arrow Stationery store in Oceantown? The man that owns it is a friend of the Browns and he told Dill he could have it until he knew what else he could do. Gosh, don't you think that's fine?"

"Yes, I do, indeed," Mrs. Hulbert said, pleased.

"Sure, and it's quite a walk to Oceantown," said Lefty, warming up to his subject. "And Dill won't have any extra dough for carfare for a while so I told him right away I'd lend him my bike until he got along. I don't use the darn thing anyway. He might as well keep it for good —that's what I told him."

Mrs. Hulbert stared at her tall, smiling

nephew. "Lefferts, Lefferts," she said, shaking an admonitory finger at him. "How will you go to Oceantown in this weather? You like to swim every day, you know—sometimes twice a day."

"Oh, that's all right, aunt," Lefty said, with smiling indifference. "I can walk and it'll be good for me. I was only thinking when I was up at Donellen—I don't do half enough hiking for a scout. . . ."

Mrs. Hulbert went to the front porch for air. After a few minutes Lefty came out of the door, whistling, dressed in old khaki and what he termed his "old working clothes." His aunt scrutinized him suspiciously.

"What now, Lefferts?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," Lefty said lightly. "I was just talking to Dill on the phone and he said he's got a lot to do around the house, but the lawn needs mowing. I haven't anything to do so I thought I'd beat it over there and slick it up for him, kind of. I'll be back in an hour."

He was gone before Mrs. Hulbert had a chance to speak. She watched him go down the street in the hot sun, his shoulders squared and his bare head gleaming in the dazzling light. Just before

he turned the corner he gave his head a vigorous shake and sent his errant lock tumbling back in place. Then he darted across the street straight for the Browns' house to work, to perspire in all that heat. Well, what was the use of trying to tell him that he was being too generous again? Dillon was the sort to go back on him—to forget, but Lefty would always find some excuse for him. The good woman shook her head despairingly, then smiled.

What was the use, indeed! Lefty was Lefty and that's all there was to it.

END

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